



Energy & Water  
Ombudsman NSW

# 21 years of EWON

then & now

# About this Report

This Annual Report is published in accordance with the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON) Charter and the Benchmarks for Industry-based Customer Dispute Resolution. The Benchmarks are Accessibility, Independence, Fairness, Accountability, Efficiency and Effectiveness.

## About our data

The data in this Report is drawn from complaints received by EWON during the 2018/2019 financial year, unless otherwise specified. EWON's open complaint data varies in accordance with complaint progression and figures in this Report reflect complaint status as at 7 July 2019.

## About our case studies

Personal information about our customers has been changed to protect their privacy.

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## Overview

The Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON) is an industry-based Ombudsman scheme which provides independent, free, informal dispute resolution services to all NSW energy and some water customers. We concentrate on achieving a fair and reasonable outcome for all complaints and all parties - we are not a consumer advocate, nor do we represent industry.

### We investigate a broad spectrum of complaints including:

- > disputed accounts
- > high bills
- > disconnection or restriction of supply
- > payment difficulties
- > reliability and quality of supply
- > connection or transfer issues
- > contract terms
- > marketing practices
- > digital meter issues
- > poor customer service.

### Our principal responsibilities as set out in the EWON Charter are to:

- > handle energy and water complaints independently, fairly, informally, expeditiously and free of charge to the customer
- > promote EWON to consumers and small business
- > encourage and provide advice to members on good complaint-handling practices to assist in reducing and avoiding complaints.

While we receive, investigate and resolve customer complaints and disputes, we also work with energy and water providers to help improve their processes and deliver consistent, high quality customer service. We help raise industry standards and reduce complaints by contributing to the development of energy and water policy through our reporting and analysis.

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# Chair's Report



It has been a very interesting and rewarding 12 months since I assumed the role of EWON Board Chair in October 2018. I have learned a great deal about the energy and water sectors and about Ombudsman services more broadly.

While EWON continues to provide quality, independent advice, information and dispute resolution to NSW energy and water consumers, I have been particularly impressed by the quality of EWON's policy work, which draws on the evidence gathered from complaints to influence government and regulator policy and address gaps in customer protections.

EWON also works constructively with members to improve their internal complaint-handling processes to help reduce the number of complaints we receive. This strategy of proactive engagement was particularly effective in the second half of the financial year. While complaints initially increased in 2018/2019, there was a marked fall in the last quarter particularly. This is a positive outcome for NSW consumers, and I would like to acknowledge the effort members made to address issues raised by EWON.

I have also been impressed by EWON's focus on engaging with the community through its extensive community outreach program which targets potentially vulnerable consumers across the state. This focus also includes the biannual Consultative Council Meetings that bring industry, government and community representatives together to discuss issues impacting on consumers. I

had the pleasure of chairing both meetings last financial year which I found very illuminating.

I was also very pleased to have been involved in EWON's 21st anniversary event at NSW Parliament House in June this year when industry, community and government agency representatives joined Directors and staff to celebrate EWON's many achievements over the last two decades.

The expansion of EWON's jurisdiction to include exempt entities in 2018 represents a welcome extension of consumer protections to the growing number of NSW residents who receive electricity and gas through an embedded network. Nevertheless, bringing residential park operators, bodies corporate and retirement villages into membership has required a significant commitment of time and resources on our part.

This investment is beginning to pay off, with EWON welcoming 17 exempt entity members, covering 26 sites and extending our services to 1,527 customers in 2018/2019. Since then, more than 31 additional exempt entities have become members, covering over 6,547 customers. Twelve new authorised members also joined EWON this year. We now face the challenge of ensuring we meet the needs of our increasingly diverse members, some of whom are fully invested in the energy or water sectors, while for others, the provision of these services is supplementary to their core operations.

EWON is fortunate to have access to strong peer support. Ombudsman Janine Young and I met with the Chairs and Ombudsman of our Queensland, Victorian and South Australian counterparts twice

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**In June 2019, the Board reappointed Janine as Ombudsman for a further three-year term and we are very much looking forward to working with Janine and her team in the years ahead.**

last financial year. We shared experiences of expanded jurisdictions and discussed current industry developments. Members of the Australian and New Zealand Energy & Water Ombudsman Network (ANZEWON) have a shared interest in ensuring they are prepared for industry and technology changes and to meet customer expectations in a rapidly changing environment. This need has led ANZEWON to commission a research report to explore customer expectations in a changing energy and water market. The research also looked at how member offices operate, respond to changing consumer needs, and ensure best practice, so that the EDR schemes will be fit for purpose in 5 to 10 years.

During the year under review, the EWON Board has focused on enhancing governance practices. This has included an external Board governance review, the development of Board and Committee Charters and a review of the risk management framework to strengthen the focus on cyber security. In my first year as Chair I have had the full support of EWON's Community and Industry Directors and I thank them for their open and positive approach to the conduct of the business of the Board throughout the year. I would particularly like to acknowledge Nicole Wallis who was re-appointed to the Board as an Industry Director at the November 2018 AGM. Nicole subsequently retired from the Board and was replaced by Chris Ryan, who was appointed to fill the vacancy from February 2019. Many thanks to Nicole for the time and commitment she gave to EWON over a number of years.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank EWON's Management Team and staff for their dedication in what has been

another very busy year for the organisation. Under Janine Young's leadership, they continue to provide a crucial service for NSW consumers. In June 2019, the Board reappointed Janine as Ombudsman for a further three-year term and we are very much looking forward to working with Janine and her team in the years ahead.

Finally, I would like to personally thank my predecessor, Professor Julian Disney AO for his considerable contribution while Chair of the EWON Board since 2012. I am extremely grateful to Julian for ensuring a smooth transition to my role and I wish him all the very best for his future endeavours.



**Tony Crawford**

Chair  
Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW

# Ombudsman's Report



The 2018/2019 financial year was very special for EWON. We celebrated our 21st anniversary which gave us the rare opportunity to take stock of what we've achieved over two decades of operation - hence the theme of this Annual Report, 21 years of EWON - then & now.

We celebrated the milestone in June 2019 with many of our stakeholders, Board Directors and staff. EWON's first Ombudsman, Clare Petre, our Board Chair Tony Crawford, the NSW Minister for Energy and Environment, the Hon. Matt Kean, and I spoke about EWON from our individual perspectives.

We chose representatives from industry and the community sector to cut the cake, symbolising the role EWON plays in balancing the needs of members and consumers. Talking to our diverse stakeholders about our achievements and the importance of our role left us with a renewed sense of purpose. Our timeline on page 14 provides an overview of EWON's key milestones since inception.

Much has changed over the years. When the then Energy Industry Ombudsman NSW (EION) was officially launched on 9 June 1998, the organisation's five staff handled 180 complaints from seven members. Today we have 81 staff, handle over 26,000 complaints and have more than 100 members - with our membership expected to expand beyond 350 in the next two years. The scope of our work has also expanded. We now have a greater focus on policy development, stakeholder engagement, member services, community outreach and other awareness raising activities.

The environment we operate in is also changing at an increasing pace, driven by new technologies and consumer demand for new and better services. Ombudsman schemes need to adapt to ensure we continue to be relevant. To assist us plan for

the future, the Australian and New Zealand Energy & Water Ombudsman Network (ANZEWON) commissioned the University of Sydney to conduct research into how our services need to change to remain fit for purpose in 2020, 2025 and 2030. The comprehensive research report will provide invaluable insights to guide our future planning and development.

## Complaint activity

EWON's complaint numbers fell marginally from 26,416 in 2017/2018 to 26,215 in 2018/2019. They increased in the first quarter of 2018/2019, contributing to a particularly busy period as our Investigations team worked to deal with a backlog built up during the high complaint environment of 2017/2018. Complaints remained relatively steady in the second and third quarters, before falling significantly in the final quarter - they were down by almost 19% on the same quarter last year.

Our top three issues were billing, customer service and credit - consistent with 2017/2018. While billing and credit remained relatively steady, customer service issues fell significantly as a percentage of complaints, down 8% from 2017/2018 (from 47% to 39%). This fall was even more notable in the last quarter of 2018/2019, when complaints related to the customer service issue 'failure to respond' decreased by 53%. Our members should be congratulated for the steps they have taken to reduce the number of these complaints coming to us. I would also like to emphasise the role EWON played in addressing this issue by putting an increased focus on working specifically with energy retailers to improve their internal dispute resolution.

Complaints related to digital meters increased by almost 52% in 2018/2019. With significant focus on the impact digital meter installation delays were having on customers, the Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC) introduced new



**Increased scrutiny of the energy sector by government, regulators and the media led to a significant number of rule changes aimed at protecting consumers.**

rules establishing clear timeframes for retailers to install meters. The rules came into effect on 1 February 2019 and initially had little impact on our digital meter complaints, but we saw a steady decline in these complaints in the April to June quarter. While this is a welcome change, issues relating to faulty installations, data accuracy and costs associated with new meters are now emerging.

### Addressing the ongoing issues of affordability - a new regulatory approach

Increased scrutiny of the energy sector by government, regulators and the media led to a significant number of rule changes aimed at protecting consumers. In 2018/2019 we developed an unprecedented number of submissions to inform these changes.

One of the most significant regulatory initiatives of 2018/2019 was the introduction by the Australian Energy Regulator (AER) of a Hardship Guideline on 1 April 2019. The Guideline aims to address inconsistency in retailer responses to affordability issues - something that EWON had been calling for. In our submissions to the AEMC and the AER regarding the development of the Guideline, we noted that not all energy retailer 'hardship programs' are equitable, and we identified a range of market practices impacting on customers facing affordability issues. We continually highlighted the need for the stigmatising term 'hardship' to be replaced with 'affordability' wherever possible, as I strongly believe it acts as a disincentive for customers to ask for help. It was encouraging that the AER noted when releasing the Guideline that language used in policies and programs can and should encourage customers who experience financial vulnerability to self-identify and engage with their retailer.

Under the supervision of the AER,

retailers are now reviewing their affordability policies to ensure they comply with the mandatory requirements in the Guideline. I sincerely hope this leads to an equitable, sector-wide approach to working constructively with customers experiencing affordability challenges.

### Expanded jurisdiction and member services

In 2018/2019, EWON began welcoming exempt entities servicing residential customers as members. This was in response to the March 2018 updates of the AER's exempt selling and network guidelines to require exempt entities supplying energy to residential customers in embedded networks to become members of the energy Ombudsman scheme in their state.

We implemented new systems to assist with the onboarding and management of an expanded and diverse member base. This included developing a new Member Management System and online membership application form, and commissioning development of a new member portal.

In accordance with EWON's constitutional changes made in June 2018, we formed an Exempt Entity and Water Industry Competition Act Operational Advisory Group. The Group provides exempt entities and small water providers a voice within EWON. The Group met quarterly in 2018/2019 and explored a range of topics, including the benefits of joining EWON, our complaint-handling processes and funding model.

In 2018/2019, we welcomed 12 new authorised energy retailers and 17 exempt entity members, bringing our total membership to 86 at 30 June 2019. We now have over 100 members and our services will soon extend to around 33,000 customers living in

residential parks, residential complexes and retirement villages. However, as we bring exempt entities into membership, there is growing scrutiny of this model of energy networks and on-selling. In June 2019, the AEMC published final recommendations for updating the regulatory framework for embedded networks, with changes expected to come into play from mid-2020. More information about the proposed framework is outlined on page 41.

### Key achievements

In late 2018/2019, we began implementing a digital transformation project to enable EWON to respond to future challenges. In preparation for this, we upgraded our Complaint Management System to streamline the process of inputting complaints and increase productivity.

At the same time, leveraging our improving technology, we addressed the backlog of aged complaints - the more complex complaints that had built up in 2017/2018.

We expanded our regional outreach, visiting 63 Local Government Areas in 2018/2019. One of the most rewarding parts of my job is attending community outreach events to speak to customers directly and see our dedicated staff providing face-to-face support. The value of personal interactions can't be underestimated. Speaking to an elderly couple at a Queanbeyan Bring Your Bills Day whose ongoing complaint was finally resolved on the day was as rewarding for me as giving evidence about energy complaints and systemic issues to the Senate Inquiry into Treasury Laws Amendment (Consumer Data Right) Bill 2019. Both interactions reflect the value of our work.

Members participated in more of our Bring Your Bills Days in 2018/2019 than ever before. We find this face-

# Ombudsman's Report

to-face engagement often leads to quick resolution of complaints, process improvements and more willingness on the part of customers to reach out to their providers when an issue arises, and we thank all of those who have taken part.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers are one of our key target groups. In mid-2019 we developed audio and visual material with the performer Sean Choolburra to use in campaigns to expand awareness of EWON's services amongst Aboriginal communities. The first campaign will be launched shortly.

We enhanced our reporting with a new look quarterly report 'EWON Insights' which provides an overview of our complaints, analysis of current issues and case studies. Tailored versions are available for members, the public and regulators. Our 2017/2018 Annual Report was recognised as a high-quality publication with a silver award in last year's Australasian Reporting Awards, a rewarding reflection of our increased focus on effective reporting.



**One of the most rewarding parts of my job is attending community outreach events to speak to customers directly.**

## Emerging issues

The Consumer Data Right (CDR) for finance, energy and telecommunications consumers is under development. The CDR is aimed at increasing the ability of consumers to compare and switch providers/plans. However, the issue of

which body will handle disputes relating to data provision remains unresolved. We are working with the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission and Federal Treasury to ensure consumers have clear recourse if issues arise with data provision.

During the year, the Federal Government announced the Default Market Offer (DMO) to replace and limit the standing offers paid by customers who are not on a market offer. The DMO came into effect on 1 July 2019 and we are monitoring complaints to identify any systemic issues that may emerge.

## Independent Review

EWON's Constitution requires an external review be conducted at least every five years. Coinciding with my fifth year as Ombudsman, Queen Margaret University's Consumer Dispute Resolution Centre has been engaged to conduct the review which considers how well EWON complies with the Australian Government's Benchmarks for Industry-based Customer Dispute Resolution – Accessibility, Independence, Fairness, Accountability, Efficiency and Effectiveness. We will share the outcomes in next year's Annual Report.

## Deputy Ombudsman appointed

EWON is increasingly called on to contribute to policy debate and engage with stakeholders. To address this need, the role of Deputy Ombudsman, previously filled between 2004 and 2007, has been reinstated. Appointing Helen Ford (formerly General Manager Governance, Awareness & Policy) as Deputy Ombudsman, with the Board's strong support, will see Helen as instrumental in supporting me to guide EWON through these challenging times.

## Looking ahead

We have an exciting year ahead. We will be developing a Reconciliation Action Plan to formally support our work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, looking at ways to increase access to our services through technology, surveying members, and continuing our drive to bring exempt entities into membership. The findings of the Independent Review and ANZEWON research will also inform our activities and be central to our business planning for 2020/2021.

Our General Manager Finance & Corporate Service, Bernadette Or, took on the Human Resource function following the departure of our General Manager People, Judy Vergison, in July 2018. Bernadette is also overseeing a key structural change – the outsourcing of our IT services – so that we can focus on information services and data analysis.

I thank Helen, Bernadette and our General Manager Investigations, Adrian Borchok, for providing strong leadership throughout the period. Above all, I'd like to thank our dedicated staff who often go above and beyond to provide exceptional customer service.

I extend my sincere thanks to the EWON Board, particularly our previous Chair, Professor Julian Disney AO and new Chair, Mr Tony Crawford. Their strategic guidance and support in our rapidly changing environment is invaluable.

**Janine Young**

Ombudsman  
Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW

# Case study

## Our first electric car complaint - we enter a new era

Mr Abbasi purchased an electric car and signed up for his energy provider's \$1 per day electric car plan. Mr Abbasi then received what he thought was a high bill, given his normal usage patterns. The bill did not show him to be on the plan he agreed to.

Mr Abbasi's provider advised him he would need to install a new meter before the plan could be put in place. Mr Abbasi was disappointed he was not told this earlier, as he would have been able to adjust his usage and use petrol in the car instead of electricity.

The new meter was installed and Mr Abbasi was advised that he would receive a credit for the difference between the car plan tariff and the amount he had been charged. When this did not

occur, he called his provider three times in two weeks and was told that someone from the electric car team would call him about his issue. When again he did not hear from his provider, Mr Abbasi called EWON.

We referred this complaint to the provider's specialist complaints resolution team for review.

The complaint was resolved to the customer's satisfaction with the provider confirming that a credit of \$800 had been applied to Mr Abbasi's account, that he was now on the correct energy plan 'Electric Car', and that the cost of installing the new meter had not been charged to him.

This was the first complaint to EWON involving an electric car.

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**Category:** Refer to higher level

**Issues:** High bills, tariff, customer service – failure to respond

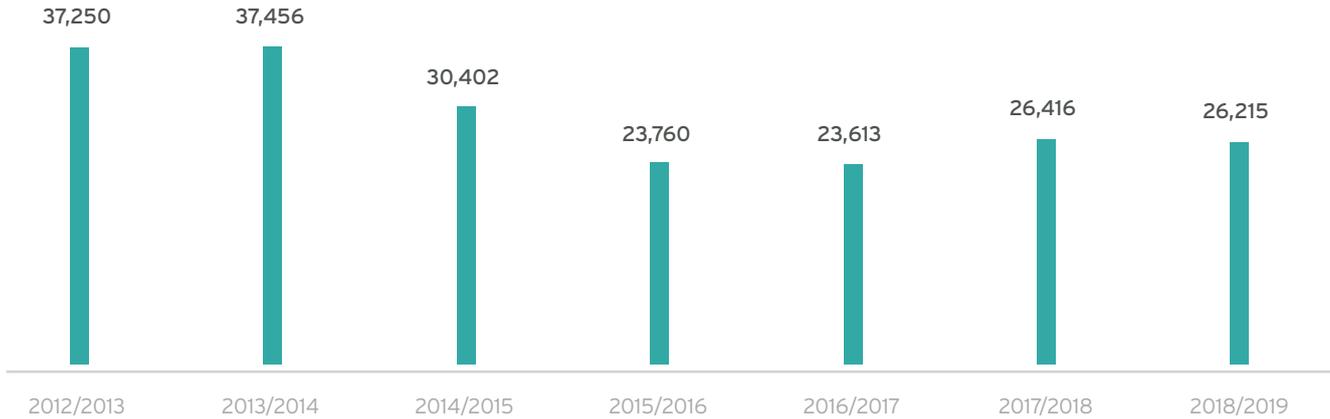
**Outcome:** Refer to higher level

The shape of the energy industry has vastly transformed during our 21-year history. We are now seeing new technologies being introduced into the market which are changing traditional customer contracts, billing systems and therefore the underlying causes for complaints.

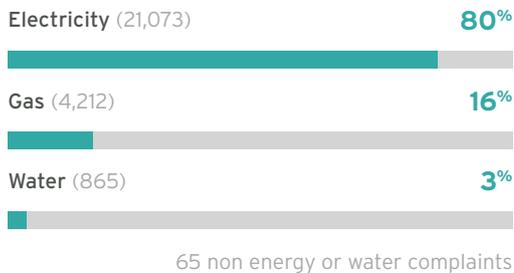
With increasing numbers of electric cars on the road it will be interesting to see how common these complaints become in the future.

# The big picture

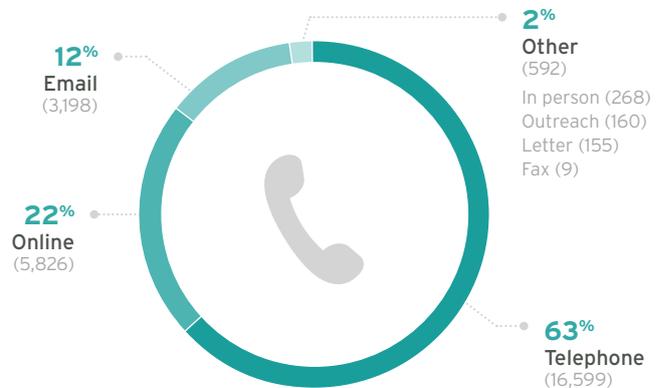
## Complaints received from 2012/2013 to 2018/2019



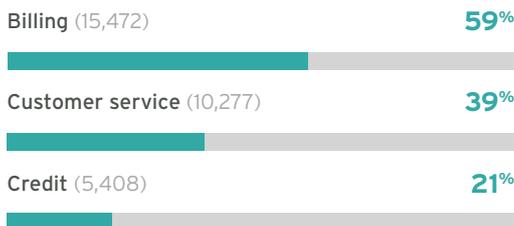
## Complaints by electricity, gas and water



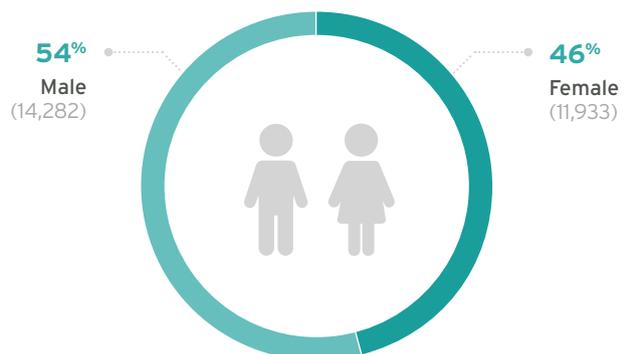
## How we receive complaints



## Top three primary issues



## Complaints by gender

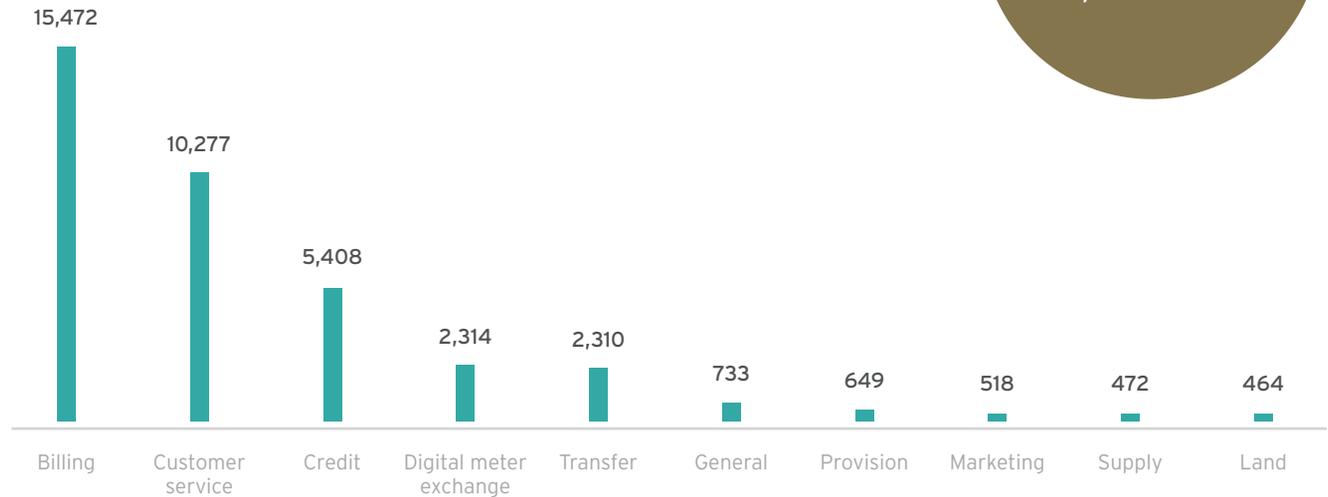


**26,215**

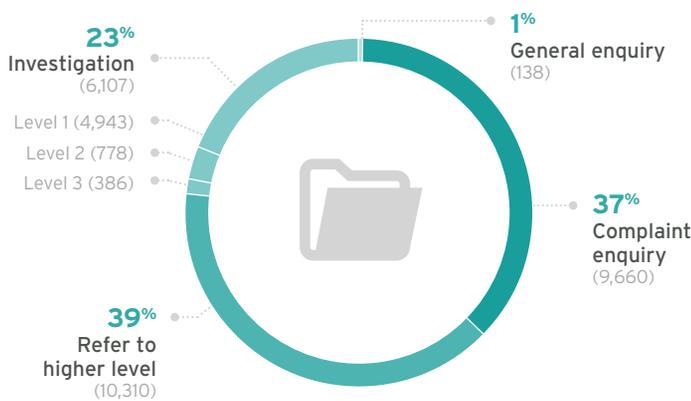
Complaints received

### Complaints received by primary issue

Customers often raise more than one issue per complaint.



### Complaints received



### Explanation of terms

#### General enquiry

A customer contact that may be about an energy or water matter but is not a complaint. In some cases, it may be out of our jurisdiction.

#### Complaint enquiry

A request for information or assistance that can be settled or referred quickly to a provider's contact centre or a referral agency.

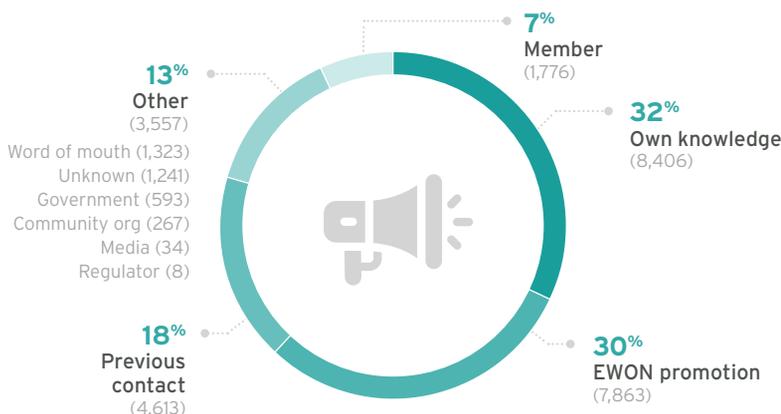
#### Refer to higher level (RHL)

A complaint referred to the energy and water provider's specialist dispute resolution team.

#### Investigation

EWON investigates and negotiates an outcome when a complaint cannot be resolved between the customer and the provider. These are categorised as level 1, 2 and 3, based on the time taken to resolve each complaint.

### How customers heard about us



# 21 years of EWON - then & now

**EWON began as the Energy Industry Ombudsman NSW (EION) and was formally launched by the NSW Minister for Energy on 9 June 1998.**

The scheme was established by the six Government-owned electricity providers at the time, as well as the transmission company Transgrid, with the support of the Electricity Association of NSW.

EWON's jurisdiction expanded after Sydney Water joined in December 1999 and EION became EWON, the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW.

The following year, AGL became the first gas member to join the scheme. Up to this time membership had been voluntary, but in 2001 legislative changes made it a licence condition for all energy retailers supplying residential and small business customers in NSW to join the approved Ombudsman scheme. The requirement for EWON membership is also now part of the licence conditions of some water providers.

Originally the EWON Board comprised only member providers and was responsible for EWON's corporate governance and funding. A Council, representing the interests of consumers, small business and industry, oversaw EWON's policies and strategic objectives.

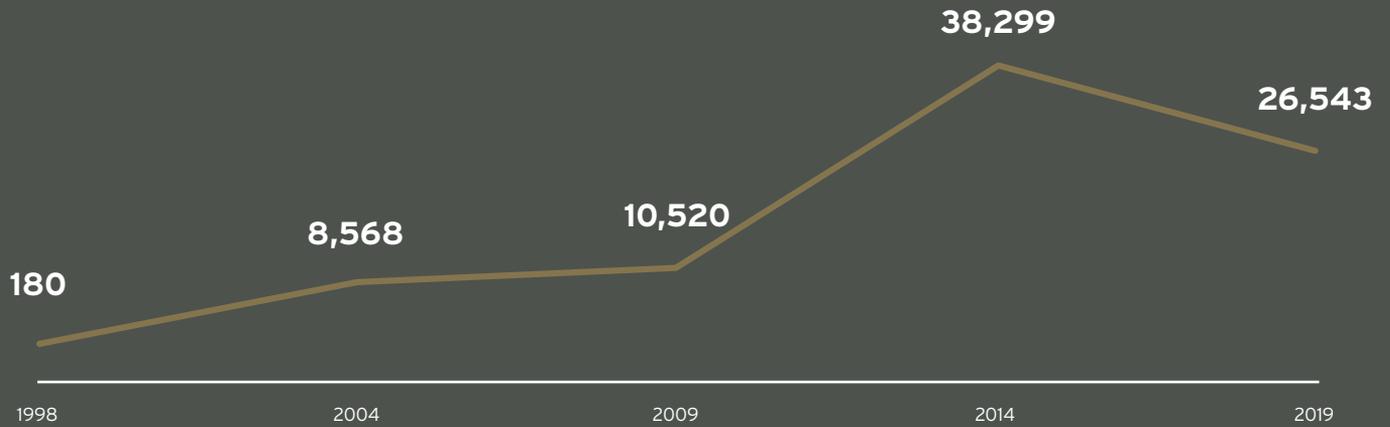
Today EWON's Board comprises an independent Chair, five Industry Directors from electricity, gas and water provider members, and five Community Directors from a variety of community organisations. EWON also convenes a Consultative Council Meeting chaired by the Board Chair twice each year. Consultative Council Meetings are open to consumer and small business representatives and members.

Clare Petre was appointed Ombudsman in April 1998 and oversaw the organisation's development for its first 16 years. Janine Young was appointed Ombudsman in November 2014, leading EWON through a significantly changing energy and water environment.

EWON has grown since its inception in 1998 from an office of five staff, seven members and 180 complaints, to over 80 staff, 86 members and over 26,000 complaints in 2018/2019. While our work always focuses on resolving complaints, we also play a key role in helping raise customer service standards in the industry, influencing government and regulator policy, and increasing awareness of our service and the energy and water issues many consumers face. As we continue to grow and adapt to the changing shape of the energy and water sectors, EWON takes a forward-looking approach and is excited to see what the future holds.

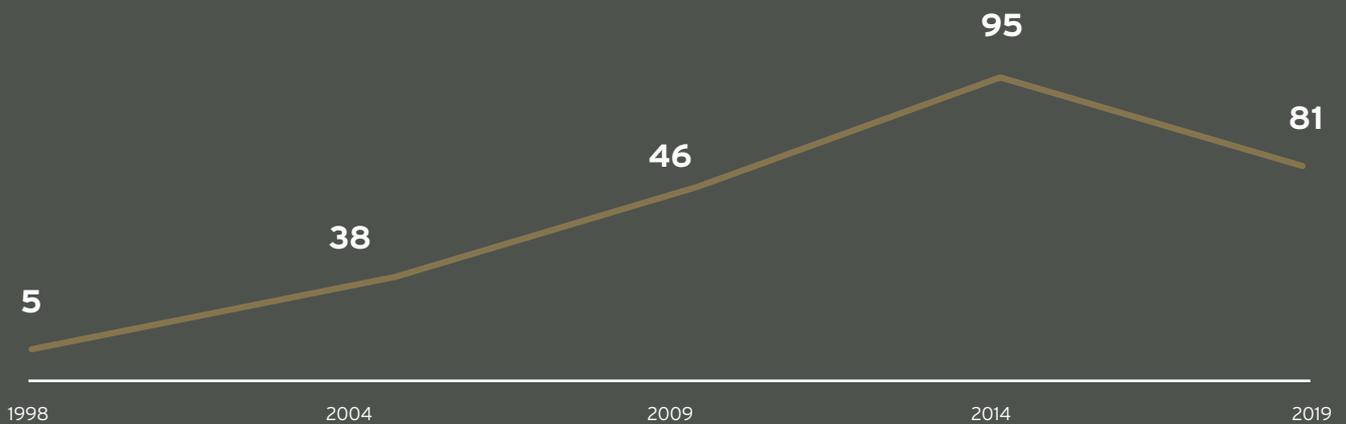
## Growth in resolved complaints

from 1998 to 2019



## EWON's staff numbers

from 1998 to 2019



## Growth in membership

from 1998 to 2019





1996

Structural reform of the electricity industry sees six retailer/distributor entities created as state-owned corporations under the Energy Services Corporations Act 1995.  
The Electricity Association of New South Wales, representing the electricity providers, proposes the establishment of an Ombudsman scheme.

1997

A working group of industry, government and consumer representatives advises on the structure and operation of the Energy Industry Ombudsman (NSW) Limited (EION).  
The Constitution and Board of Directors is established.



1998

The EION Council meets, comprising Chair Gae Pincus and equal representation of consumer and industry interests.  
Clare Petre is appointed Energy Industry Ombudsman NSW.  
EION is officially launched by the Minister for Energy, the Hon. Bob Debus on 9 June.

1999

Sydney Water joins the scheme and EION becomes the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON).

2000

AGL, a private company, is the first gas provider to join the scheme.  
The Electricity Supply Amendment Act 2000, makes it a licence condition for all electricity retailers to join an approved Ombudsman scheme.  
EWON's jurisdiction is extended to allow residential and small business customers supplied by exempt sellers to raise complaints.  
Former Deputy Prime Minister, Lionel Bowen, is appointed Chair of the EWON Council.  
EWON runs its first outreach program to multicultural communities.



2001

Under the Gas Supply Amendment (Retail Competition) Act, it becomes a licence condition for gas retailers to join an industry approved scheme.  
The NSW Minister for Energy approves EWON as the electricity and gas industry Ombudsman for NSW.

2002

The NSW energy market is opened to full retail competition and second-tier energy retailers join EWON.

2003

Emeritus Professor Stuart Rees is appointed Chair of the EWON Council.  
EWON appoints its first Aboriginal Project Officer to conduct outreach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.  
As part of the Aboriginal outreach program, Vee Thornbury, a Wiradjuri artist, is commissioned to produce an artwork telling the story of EWON.

2008

The Ombudsman meets with the NSW Government's Unsworth Committee regarding its review of the customer impact of the proposed privatisation of state-owned energy retailers.



2009

The Gas Supply Amendment (Ombudsman Scheme) Bill 2009 is passed requiring gas distributors to be members of EWON as a licence condition.  
EWON's Constitution is amended to allow a broader range of water providers to join the scheme.  
Shoalhaven Water is the first Local Council to join the scheme as a voluntary member.



2010

Professor Julian Disney AO is appointed Chair of the EWON Council.

2012

Following a governance review, EWON transitions to a unitary governance structure and develops a Charter and new Constitution.

The Board restructure comprises equal industry and consumer representation. The Council is disbanded and replaced with the Consultative Council.

Professor Julian Disney AO is appointed independent Chair of the EWON Board.



2013

EWON organises a National Energy Affordability Roundtable in partnership with other energy Ombudsman services and stakeholders.  
EWON pilots its first Bring Your Bills Day, partnering with SydWest Multicultural Services in Blacktown.  
The Australian Energy Regulator introduces the National Energy Consumer Framework to strengthen consumer protections for energy customers in NSW, South Australia and Queensland.

2014

EWON's complaint numbers peak as a result of significant increases in electricity costs and new retailer billing systems. They decline after billing systemic issues are addressed.  
Janine Young is appointed Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW.



2015

EWON implements the organisational values of Independence, Respect, One Team, Integrity, Social Justice and Service Excellence.  
EWON is restructured and a quality assurance framework is introduced.

2016

EWON expands its community outreach program to provide equitable focus on regional, rural and remote NSW.  
EWON improves its systemic issues framework and reporting system.  
EWON rebrands giving it a fresh and dynamic visual identity. The new website and online complaint form initiate an increase in the proportion of online complaints.  
EWON calls for the expansion of its jurisdiction to include embedded energy networks.



2017

Regular monitoring of consumer awareness of EWON begins, thanks to Energy Consumers Australia including Ombudsman awareness questions in its bi-annual customer sentiment surveys.  
EWON enhances members services with the launch of EWONLink, a new online portal for members, and by making member induction sessions available via video conferencing for the first time.

2018

The Australian Energy Regulator requires exempt entities servicing residential customers to become members of the scheme.  
The EWON Constitution is amended to facilitate the entry of exempt entities into membership.  
The NSW Minister for Energy and Utilities, the Hon. Don Harwin re-approves EWON as the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW.  
Tony Crawford is appointed Chair of the EWON Board.

2019

Energy and Water Ombudsman offices commission independent research - "What will consumers expect of an energy and water Ombudsman in 2020, 2025, and 2030?" - given the major changes occurring across the sectors.  
EWON marks 21 years of service with the NSW Minister for Energy and Environment, the Hon. Matt Kean, and Board Directors, industry, community and government stakeholders and staff in attendance.

# About us

## EWON Board

The EWON Board is responsible for corporate governance, budget approval and strategic direction. The Board comprises an independent Chair, five Industry Directors from electricity, gas and water provider members and five Community Directors from a variety of community organisations.

In 2018/2019 there were several changes to the Board. Professor Julian Disney AO stepped down as Board Chair in September 2018 and Mr Tony Crawford was appointed Chair commencing 1 October 2018. The terms of Nicole Wallis and Ian Israelsohn came to an end. Both renominated at the November AGM and were re-appointed to the Board. Following this, Nicole Wallis resigned with effect from the end of December 2018, and Chris Ryan was appointed to the Board to fill the vacancy from February 2018 until the end of Nicole's original term.

## EWON Operational Advisory Group

The Exempt Entity and Water Industry Competition Act Operational Advisory Group was established in accordance with EWON constitutional changes made in June 2018. The Group provides exempt entities and small water providers with a voice within EWON and ensures the smooth entry of this new group of members. The Group meets regularly and will operate for up to three years.

The Group's first meeting was held in July 2018. It continued to meet quarterly and explored the following topics:

- > the benefits of joining EWON
- > how EWON handles complaints
- > our funding model
- > complaint-handling and internal dispute resolution best practice
- > the role of agents
- > our policy work and systemic issues.

The work of the Group is an important part of EWON's expanded jurisdiction and the incorporation of exempt entities into EWON membership.

## EWON Consultative Council

Consultative Council Meetings are part of EWON's constitutional framework. They offer an open forum for consumer and small business representatives, our members and other stakeholders to meet, raise issues and put forward their views. They also allow us to update and consult with attendees, all of whom are key stakeholders, and the outcomes of these consultations contribute to our planning. In accordance with EWON's Constitution, we convene Consultative Council Meetings twice a year. In 2018/2019, our Consultative Council Meetings were held on 25 October 2018 and 30 April 2019. See page 53 for more information about these meetings.

## Our strategic objectives

EWON strives to achieve the best possible outcomes for its customers and members.

Our strategic objectives set out EWON's direction for the three-year period to June 2021, ensuring we continue to provide high quality, independent advice, information and dispute resolution to NSW energy and water consumers. They also ensure we identify and address systemic issues, expand our reach across NSW, work with members and contribute high quality policy submissions.

Expanded awareness

Valued membership

Agile in a dynamic environment

Influential policy contribution

Tony Crawford  
Chair

Maria Good  
Community Director

Iain Maitland  
Community Director

Robyn Evans  
Community Director

Max Bosotti  
Community Director

Wayne Warburton  
Community Director



## The Benchmarks

EWON plans its activities and measures its performance against the Australian Government's Benchmarks for Industry-based Customer Dispute Resolution (CDR Benchmarks). The CDR Benchmarks provide standards and encourage best practice in industry-based dispute resolution services. The six benchmarks are:

Accessibility

Accountability

Independence

Efficiency

Fairness

Effectiveness

### Reflecting the Benchmarks in our complaint management

#### Internal review

We apply the principles of procedural fairness in our decision making. We provide opportunities for all parties to participate in the process, and we explain the reasons for our decisions in writing. Customers can request a review of our decision if they are not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation and they:

- > identify bias in our investigation, or
- > provide relevant new information which may change the outcome of the complaint, or
- > identify an error or omission by EWON.

This year we received 15 formal requests for internal review from 6,429 finalised investigations. While all 15 reviews found that no further investigation was required, we did identify opportunities to improve complaint management and customer communication.

#### Timely complaint management

We closely monitor how we respond to complaints, the time taken to resolve complaints, and the outcome of investigations. We met the benchmark of finalising 90% of complaints within 30 days and only 4% of complaints were open longer than 90 days, well within the benchmark target of 5%.



# 90%

of complaints were resolved within 30 days

David Stockler  
Industry Director

Ian Israelsohn  
Industry Director

Jan Prichard  
Industry Director

Jane Mills  
Industry Director

Chris Ryan  
Industry Director



# About us

## Our team

Structural changes made in 2018/2019 include:

- > The appointment of a Deputy Ombudsman to provide strategic support to the Ombudsman and undertake high level stakeholder engagement
- > The appointment of an Operations Manager Complaints to support continuous improvement projects
- > The incorporation of the Human Resources and Learning and Development functions from a former People team into the Finance & Corporate Services team
- > The appointment of an Executive Officer to support the Ombudsman
- > The engagement of additional resource in the Governance team due to the expansion of EWON's member base
- > The appointment of a Design & Communications Officer to enhance the quality of our public, member and internal communications.

EWON's three core teams working under the leadership of the Ombudsman:

**Investigations**

**Governance, Awareness & Policy**

**Finance & Corporate Services**



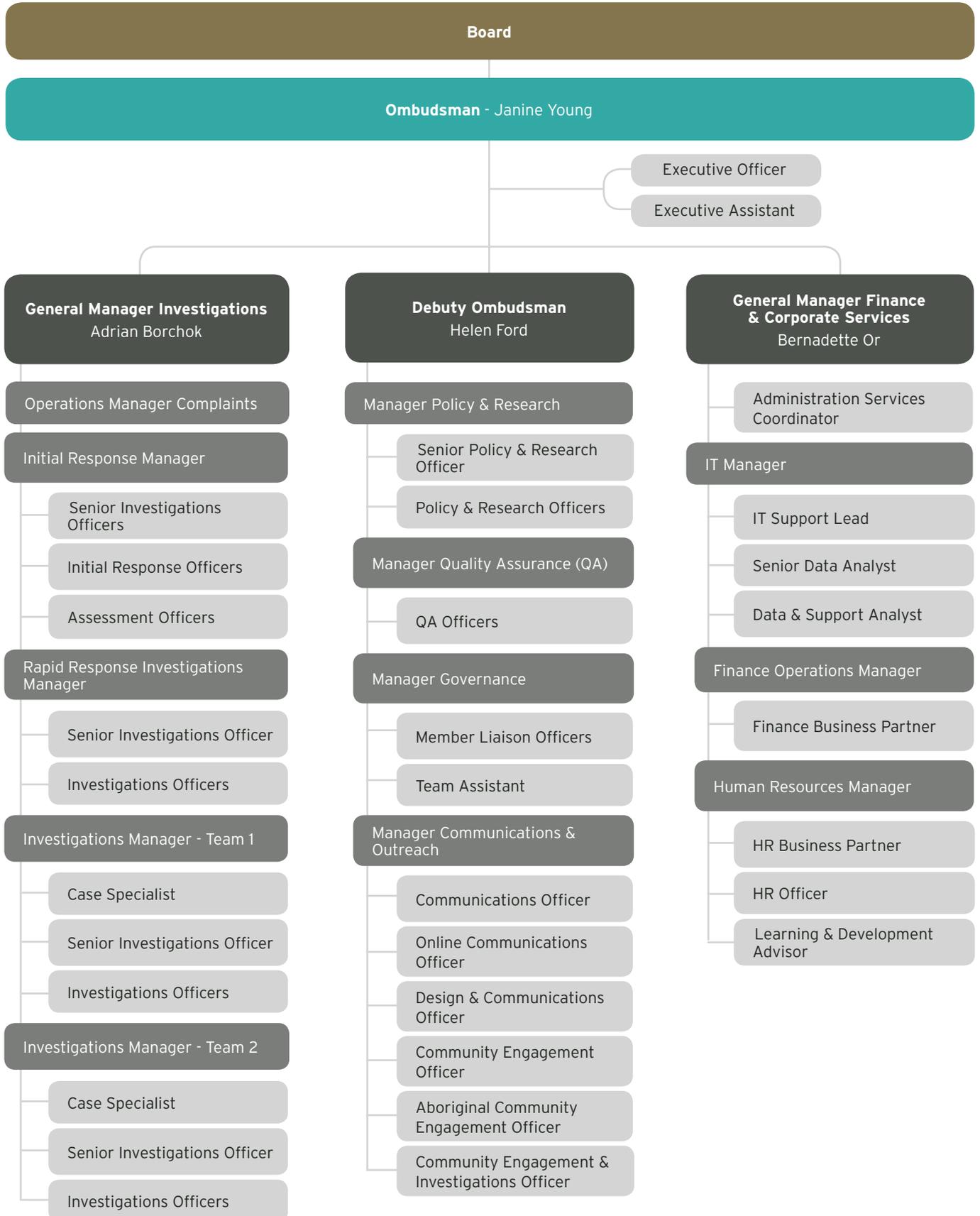
**Bernadette Or**  
 General Manager Finance  
 & Corporate Services

**Helen Ford**  
 Deputy Ombudsman

**Janine Young**  
 Ombudsman

**Adrian Borchok**  
 General Manager  
 Investigations

# Organisational chart



# Complaints and enquiries

## General enquiry

**A customer contact seeking information or assistance that may be about an energy or water matter but is not a complaint or is out of our jurisdiction.**

Sometimes customers contact us with an energy or water enquiry, but they don't have a specific complaint. They may also call about something outside our jurisdiction such as a problem with a solar installer or their phone provider. When this occurs, we note their call and refer them to the organisation that can respond to their enquiry or resolve their complaint. We finalise these complaints as general enquiries.

138

general enquiries

## Complaint enquiry

**A request for information or assistance that can be quickly settled or referred to a provider's contact centre or other agency.**

Customers may contact us with questions that we can address immediately, such as a request for referral to an agency that distributes Energy Account Payment Assistance. Another example is a query about an approved fee or charge on their account.

A customer may also contact us with a complaint about their energy or water provider which they have not yet raised with their provider. When this happens, we provide general advice including information about the customer's rights and responsibilities. We then refer customers to their provider, empowered to resolve the problem without our further involvement. We let them know they can contact us again if they are not satisfied with their provider's response. These complaints are resolved as complaint enquiries.

9,660

complaint enquiries

## Refer to higher level

**A complaint referred to the energy or water provider's specialist dispute resolution team.**

Often customers contact us about complaints that they tried, unsuccessfully, to resolve with their providers, most often at contact centre level. We offer to refer them to their provider's specialist dispute resolution team. If the customer agrees to this, we provide advice and information about their rights and responsibilities and categorise these complaints as refer to higher level (RHL).

The provider's specialist team is required to contact the customer directly, within five days, to resolve the complaint. We inform the customer they can return to EWON if they are not satisfied with the outcome or haven't been contacted by the provider within five days.

This approach gives the provider a further opportunity to resolve the customer's problem directly. It also gives the customer a chance to have their complaint reviewed by senior staff working in the provider's specialist complaints area.

EWON conducts surveys of customers whose complaints were referred in this way to monitor the performance of providers and ensure the RHL process continues to be an efficient and effective way to resolve these types of complaints. View the survey results on page 35.

10,310

refer to higher  
level complaints

## Investigations

**EWON investigates a complaint that cannot be resolved between the customer and the provider. These are categorised as level 1, 2 and 3, based on the time taken to resolve each complaint.**

We investigate complaints when customers have tried unsuccessfully to resolve their complaint with their provider, including when they return to us after an RHL because they are not satisfied with the response they received.

An investigation involves speaking to both parties to determine the facts and circumstances from each point of view. We analyse information from the provider, for example metering data, telephone calls between the customer and the contact centre, and energy contracts. We also review relevant legislative provisions, conduct research, and in some cases, make site visits and consult with independent experts. If appropriate, we also offer to refer the customer to other services such as welfare agencies, financial counselling and tenant advisory services, as part of our investigation.

Investigated complaints are categorised by level. A level 1 complaint is most often resolved in up to 240 minutes or four active hours of investigation. It usually involves collecting information related to the investigation and talking with the customer and provider several times during a period of up to five weeks.

When a complaint cannot be resolved at level 1 and further investigation is needed, we upgrade it to level 2. Level 2 complaints normally involve more in-depth research, investigation and analysis (they may also require a detailed complaint assessment to be prepared for the customer). These most often take up to 90 days to resolve.

The complaint investigation is upgraded to level 3 if it is not resolved after 480 minutes of investigation time and needs further investigation. These complaints can also involve unsuccessful requests for information from the provider or the customer and may require expert advice to reach an outcome. Usually, level 3 complaints are resolved within seven months. Very complex complaints can take up to or beyond 12 months.

**At 30 June 2019 we had 6,107 investigations open; 4,943 at level 1, 778 at level 2 and 386 at level 3.**

**4,943**

level 1 investigations

**778**

level 2 investigations

**386**

level 3 investigations

## Outcomes

### Facilitated resolutions

A facilitated resolution occurs when the customer and provider work with us, taking positive and proactive steps to resolve non-complex complaints. Facilitated resolutions most often involve multiple telephone discussions, using our conciliation approach, rather than written interactions.

### Negotiated resolutions

Negotiated resolutions involve conducting a full investigation when we are actively involved in negotiating a fair and reasonable outcome for both parties.

### No further investigation

When our investigation finds that the provider's position is fair and reasonable, when the customer withdraws a complaint, or where the customer does not stay in contact with us, a complaint is closed on the grounds of 'no further investigation'. We send the customer a complaint assessment detailing the outcome of our investigation and the rationale for our decision. The customer can request a review of that decision within 28 days of receiving our complaint assessment.

### Binding decisions

Investigations are escalated to the Ombudsman for a binding decision when an investigation remains unresolved and the provider's final resolution offer does not meet the merits of the complaint. The Ombudsman then makes a decision to resolve the complaint. This may occur at any stage of an investigation.

**In 2018/2019, no binding decisions were made by the Ombudsman.**

# Complaints this year

Electricity accounted for 80% of our complaints in 2018/2019, up from 78% in 2017/2018. Gas complaints fell as a percentage of total complaints from 19% in 2017/2018 to 16% in 2018/2019, while water complaints remained stable at 3% of all complaints.

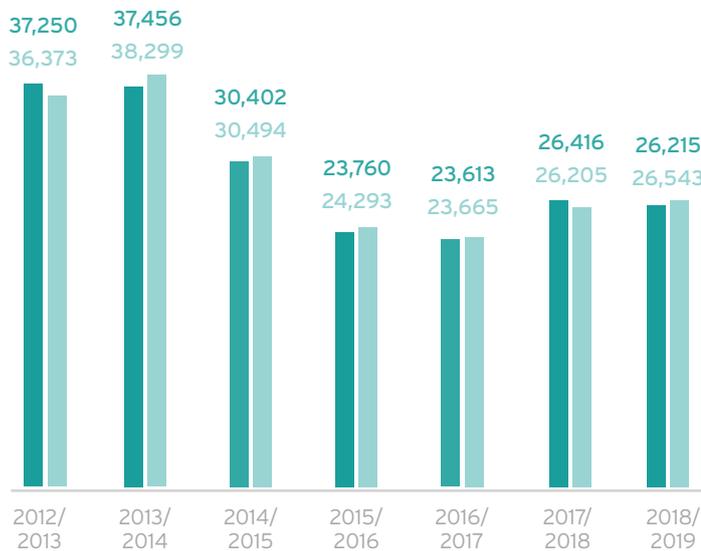
Complaints about exempt electricity sellers, while low in number, increased by 33%, a reflection of our changing membership base. Complaints about authorised electricity retailers increased by 2%, while complaints about authorised

electricity distributors remained consistent with last year. Exempt seller gas complaints increased by 10%, but fell for retailers and distributors by 12% and 39% respectively. Complaints related to water distribution were up by 28%, while retail complaints fell by 9%.

We resolved 26,543 complaints in 2018/2019, up from 26,205 complaints in 2017/2018. Some of these were carried forward from the previous financial year and were resolved in the 2018/2019 financial year.

## Complaints received and resolved

● Cases received ● Cases resolved



## Industry sector comparison

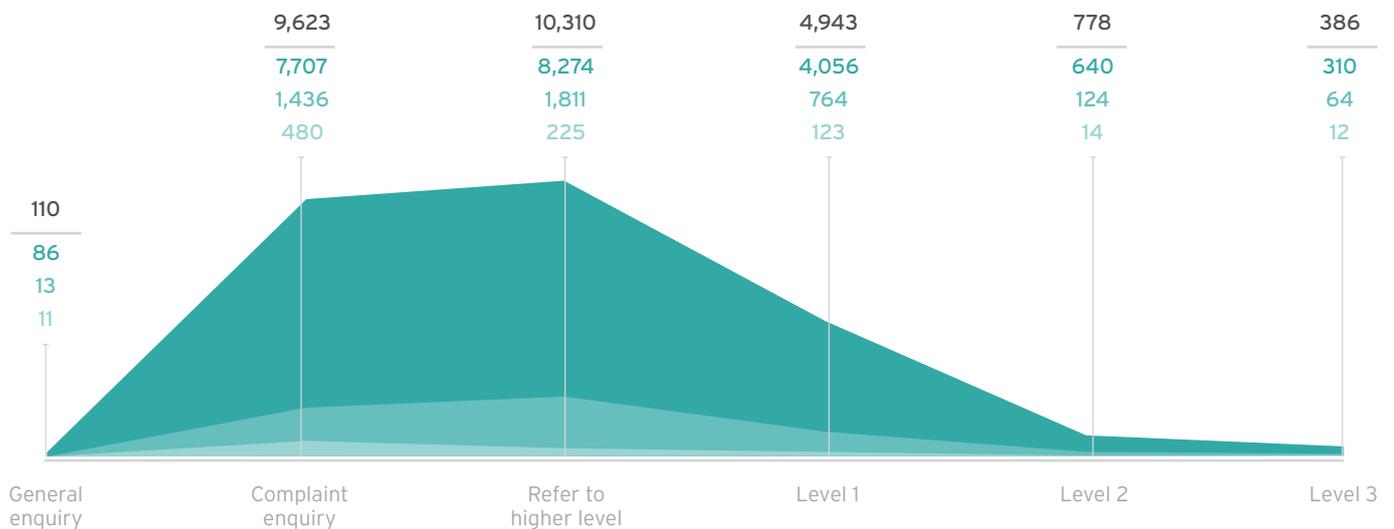
	Provider service	2018/2019	% change from 2017/2018
<b>Electricity</b>	Retail	19,654	+ 2%
	Network	955	+ 0%
	Not allocated*	318	- 12%
	Exempt entity	146	+ 33%
<b>Gas</b>	Retail	3,963	- 12%
	Network	209	- 39%
	Not allocated*	29	+ 21%
	Exempt entity	11	+ 10%
<b>Water</b>	Retail	512	- 9%
	Network	280	+ 28%
	Not allocated*	73	+ 52%
<b>Non energy/water</b>	Not allocated*	65	- 11%
<b>Total</b>		<b>26,215</b>	<b>- 1%</b>

\* Not allocated = not stated/out of jurisdiction

## Complaint level by industry

General and complaint enquiry figures below do not include non energy or water complaints

● Total ● Electricity ● Gas ● Water



# Case studies

## Water restriction lifted after help from payment assistance vouchers and financial counselling

Mr Nicholls fell behind on his water bills owing to a workplace injury. His worker's compensation payments were on hold due to an appeal. He had requested a payment extension with his water provider but could not keep up with his payments, so the provider restricted his supply. Mr Nicholls called EWON for help as he had two children at home and couldn't afford to pay the \$500 owing on his account.

We called his water provider to check the restriction was compliant and began negotiating terms for the restriction to be removed. His provider offered to remove the restriction on the condition Mr Nicholls made an appointment with a financial counsellor and obtained vouchers through the government-funded Payment Assistance Scheme.

Mr Nicholls agreed to meet with a financial counsellor and his water provider arranged to restore his supply. The following day, a financial counsellor visited him and then spoke to his provider on his behalf. His provider applied a \$300 credit on his account, and he received \$200 in payment assistance vouchers to cover the outstanding amount on his bill. Mr Nicholls called to thank us for our assistance.

**Category:** Level 1 investigation

**Issues:** Disconnection/restriction, payment difficulties – arrears

**Outcome:** Negotiated resolution

## Under-estimation leaves customer with a high 'catch up' bill

Mr Travis called EWON to dispute an outstanding balance on his electricity bill of \$1,300. He said that he had been talking to his provider about this bill since July 2017 and had not reached a resolution.

Mr Travis said he had received several reminder notices via email and SMS and the retailer had sent a disconnection warning. He had been paying his bill off periodically but did not want to start a payment plan with his retailer until it agreed to review the accuracy of the bill or conduct a meter inspection.

Mr Travis requested that EWON review the billing, particularly the disputed amount of \$1,300.

EWON's review showed that the retailer billed Mr Travis appropriately. Our investigation identified that the higher than expected bill was due to a previous bill being estimated. When an actual meter read was done, the usage for the period was higher than estimated and therefore the high bill contained a 'catch up' component.

The retailer agreed to apply a credit of \$530 to Mr Travis' account as it had failed to review his bill and explain why the disputed bill was so high. It also gave the customer a further two weeks to pay the remaining balance of \$770. The customer accepted this outcome.

**Category:** Level 3 investigation

**Issues:** High/disputed bill, impending disconnection, poor customer service

**Outcome:** Negotiated resolution

# Complaints by Local Government Areas

per 1,000 people



## Key

- 1 - 3
- 4 - 6
- 7 - 9
- 10+

\*map not to scale

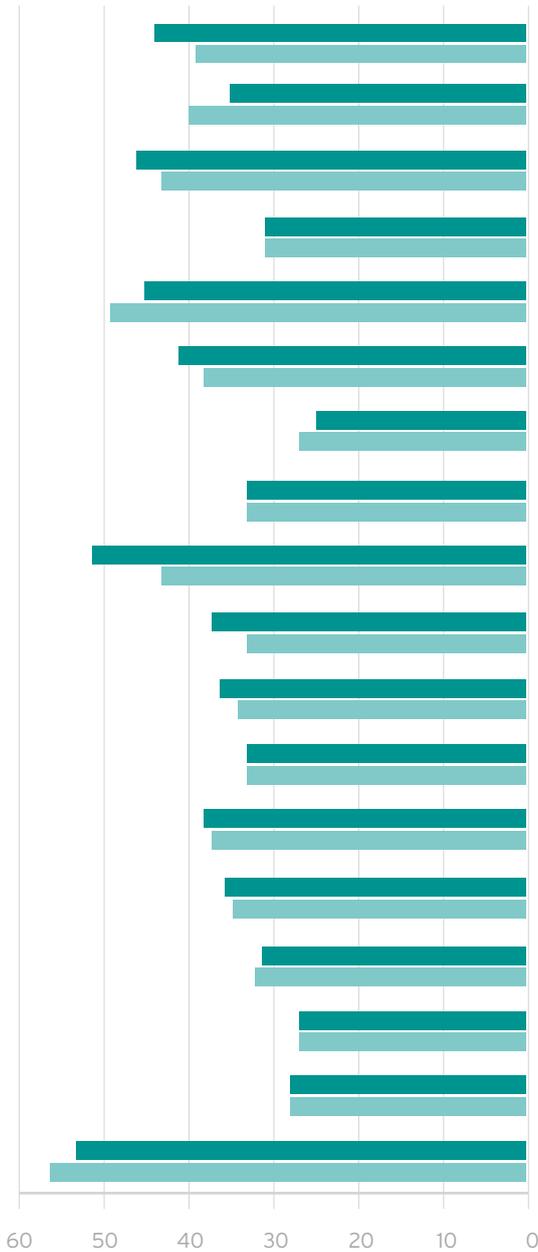
## Complaints in Sydney

Bayside	3 ●	Fairfield	2 ●	Mosman	3 ●	Sutherland Shire	3 ●
Blacktown	3 ●	Georges River	2 ●	North Sydney	4 ●	Sydney	11 ●
Burwood	3 ●	Hornsby	3 ●	Northern Beaches	3 ●	The Hills Shire	3 ●
Camden	3 ●	Hunters Hill	3 ●	Parramatta	3 ●	Waverley	3 ●
Campbelltown	3 ●	Inner West	4 ●	Penrith	3 ●	Willoughby	3 ●
Canada Bay	3 ●	Ku-ring-gai	2 ●	Randwick	3 ●	Woolahra	4 ●
Canterbury-Bankstown	3 ●	Lane Cove	4 ●	Ryde	3 ●		
Cumberland	3 ●	Liverpool	3 ●	Strathfield	5 ●		

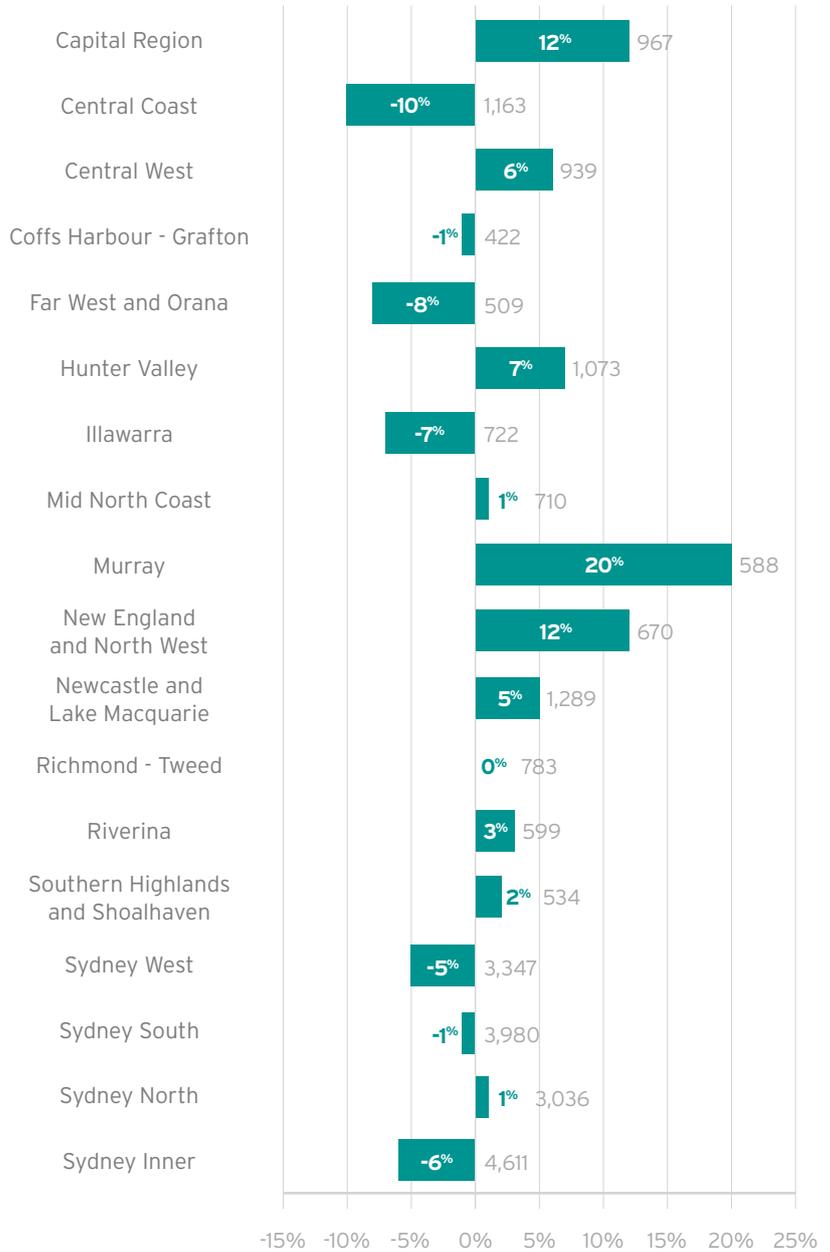
Complaints may be higher in some regional areas due to our community outreach initiatives.

### Complaints per 10,000 people by NSW region

2018/2019 2017/2018

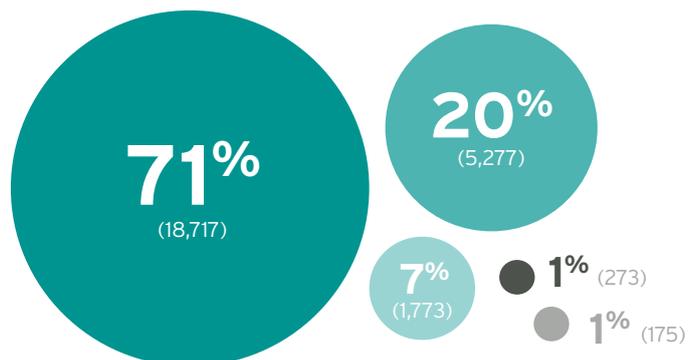


### Total complaints and percentage change by NSW region



### Location of customers lodging a complaint

- Major cities
- Inner regional
- Outer regional
- Non-NSW
- Remote/very remote

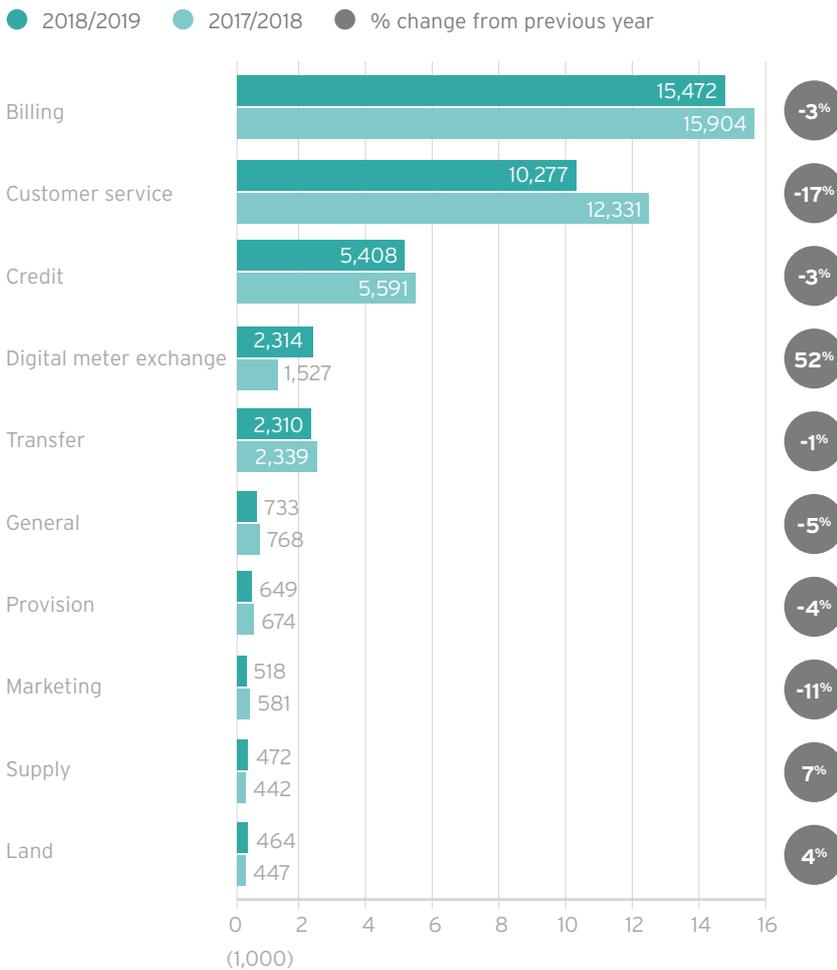


In 2018/2019 we changed our reporting regions to align with the Australian Bureau of Statistics' NSW regions and introduced an automated address allocation system to improve the accuracy of our data. As such, 2017/2018 regional complaint data may vary with data published previously.

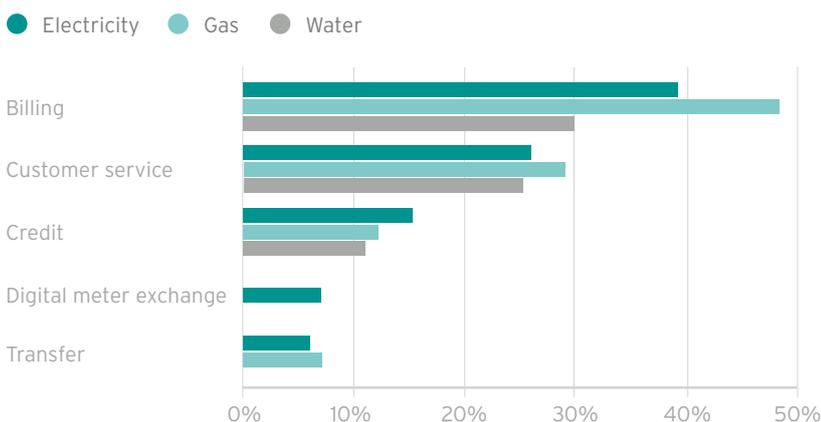
# Complaint issues

We open one complaint when a customer contacts us but they often experience more than one complaint issue, such as a high bill and poor customer service. Therefore the number of complaint issues is greater than the number of complaints we receive.

## Complaints by primary issue



## Top five complaint issues by industry



## How we categorise complaint issues

### Billing

High and disputed bills, fees and charges, opening/closing accounts.

### Credit

Disconnection, arrears, payment difficulty, payment arrangement declined, debt collection.

### Customer service

Failure to respond, incorrect advice, poor attitude/service.

### Transfer

Error in billing or transfer of account due to switching retailers, contract terms, delay in transfer, site ownership.

### Digital meter exchange

Delay, meter not installed, incorrect advice, failure to respond/notify, billing, terms and conditions.

### General

Non-energy/water related, contractors.

### Provision

Problems with new or existing connections.

### Marketing

Conduct by marketers, misleading information, pressure, non-account holder signed up.

### Land

Impact of network assets, maintenance, environment.

### Supply

Quality, damage/loss, outages.

## Billing

15,472 complaints involved billing issues

Issue	No. complaints
High	7,926
Estimation	2,617
Opening/closing account	2,250
Error	1,947
Tariff	1,351
Fees and charges	1,034
Backbill	965
Meter	783
Rebate/concession	703
Period	603
Delay	572
Other	570
Refund or credit	373
Format	138
Debt transfer	42

## Customer service

10,277 complaints involved customer service issues

Issue	No. complaints
Poor service	6,072
Failure to respond	3,228
Incorrect advice/information	1,719
Failure to consult/inform	1,396
Business to business	550
Unprofessional attitude	207
Online	136
Privacy	134

## Credit

5,408 complaints involved credit issues

Issue	No. complaints
Payment difficulties	2,584
Disconnection/restriction	2,253
Collection	1,706

## Transfer

2,310 complaints involved transfer issues

Issue	No. complaints
In error	573
Site ownership	556
Without consent	427
Delay	375
Contract terms	297
Billing	172
Rejected by retailer	136
Cooling off rights	92

Customers often raise more than one issue per complaint.

## Digital meter exchange

2,314 complaints involved digital meter exchange issues

Issue	No. complaints
Delay	1,475
Billing	395
Not installed	261
Incorrect advice/information	226
Fault	197
Failure to respond	138
Other	120
Opt in/opt out	61
Damage	43
Failure to notify	42
Terms and conditions	37
Transfer	20

## Provision

649 complaints involved provision issues

Issue	No. complaints
New connection	318
Existing connection	296
Disconnection/restriction	50

## Marketing

518 complaints involved marketing issues

Issue	No. complaints
Misleading	331
Information	96
Pressure	82
Other	40
Non-account holder	18

## Land

464 complaints involved land issues

Issue	No. complaints
Network assets	262
Property damage/restoration	152
Vegetation management	41
Street lighting	25
Other	25
Easement	19

## Supply

472 complaints involved supply issues

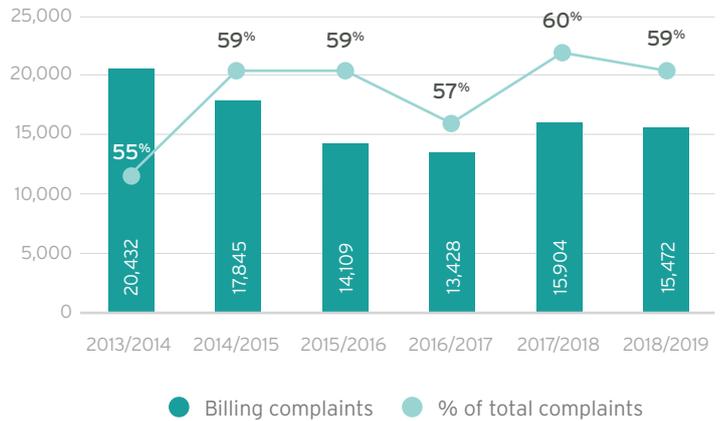
Issue	No. complaints
Off supply (unplanned)	232
Off supply (planned)	132
Variation	56
Quality	38
Sewer overflow/blockage	33
Water restriction	1

# Complaint issues

## Focusing on the top three issues

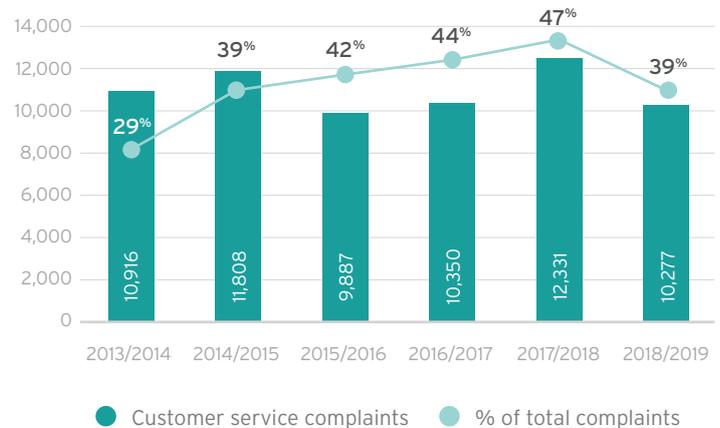
### Billing

Billing continued to be our biggest issue, present in 59% of all complaints. Billing issues include high or disputed accounts, estimated bills, opening and closing accounts and fees and charges.



### Customer service

Customer service issues were present in 39% of complaints received. Customer service is often an underlying factor for customers contacting EWON, but for these complaints customer service was a driving factor.

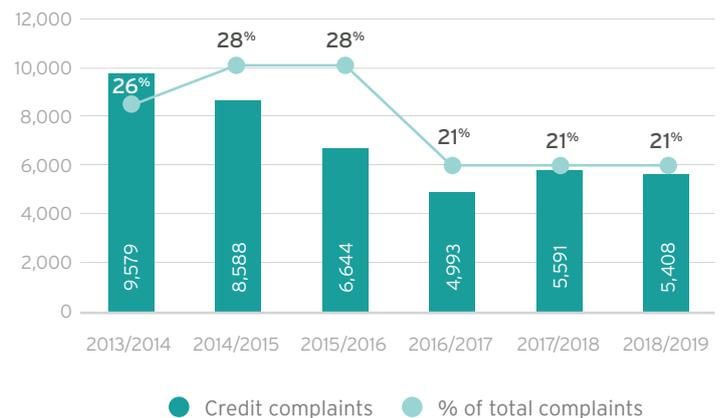


### Credit

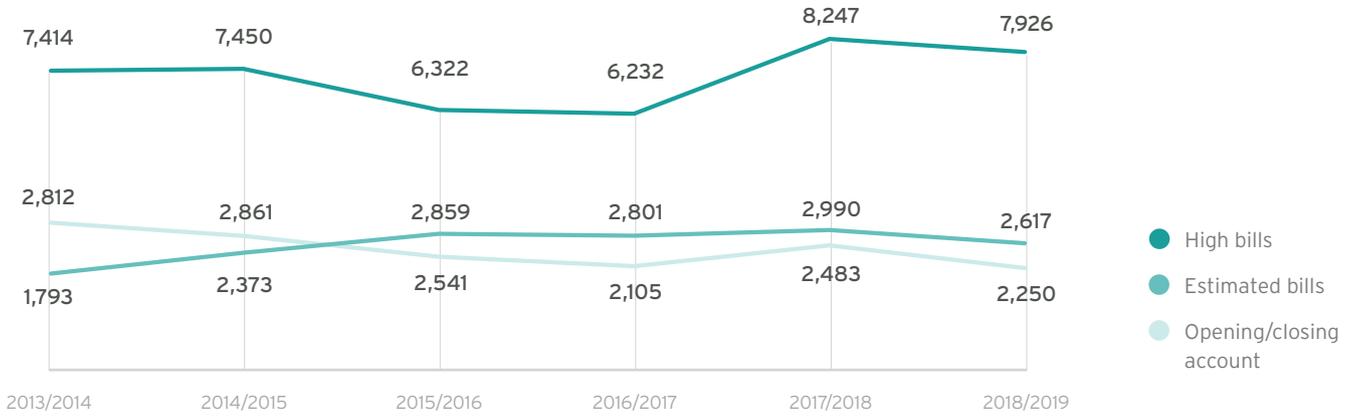
Credit-related complaints continue to be our third biggest issue, present in 21% of complaints. Credit issues underpin energy affordability issues, which are a key focus of EWON.

  
**1,256**  
 actual disconnection complaints

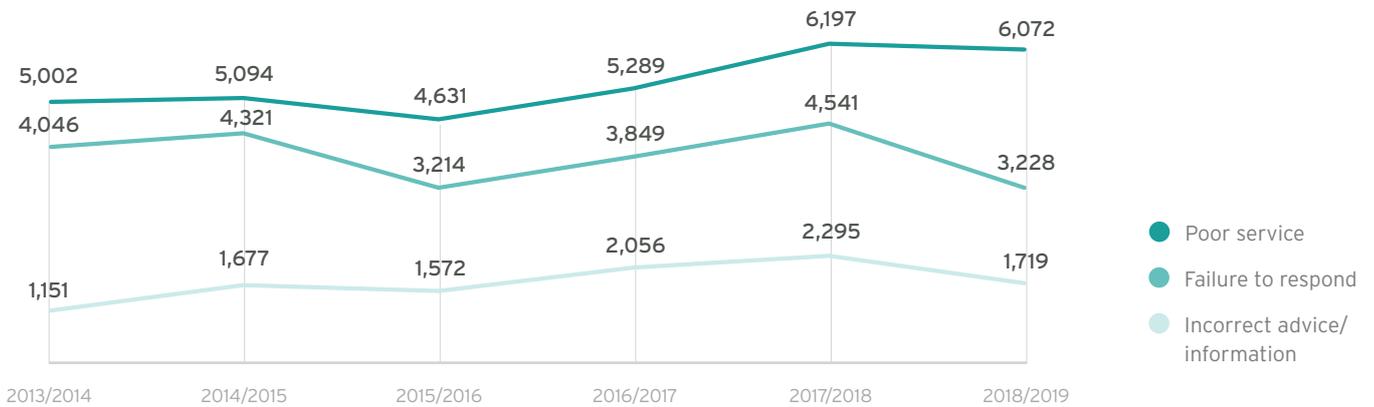
  
**999**  
 impending disconnection complaints



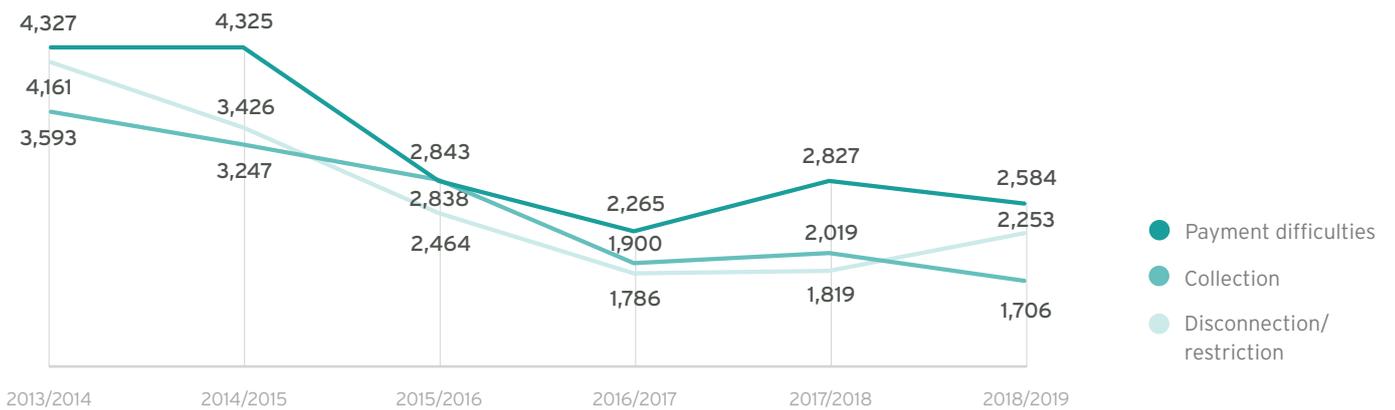
### Trends in billing complaints



### Trends in customer service complaints



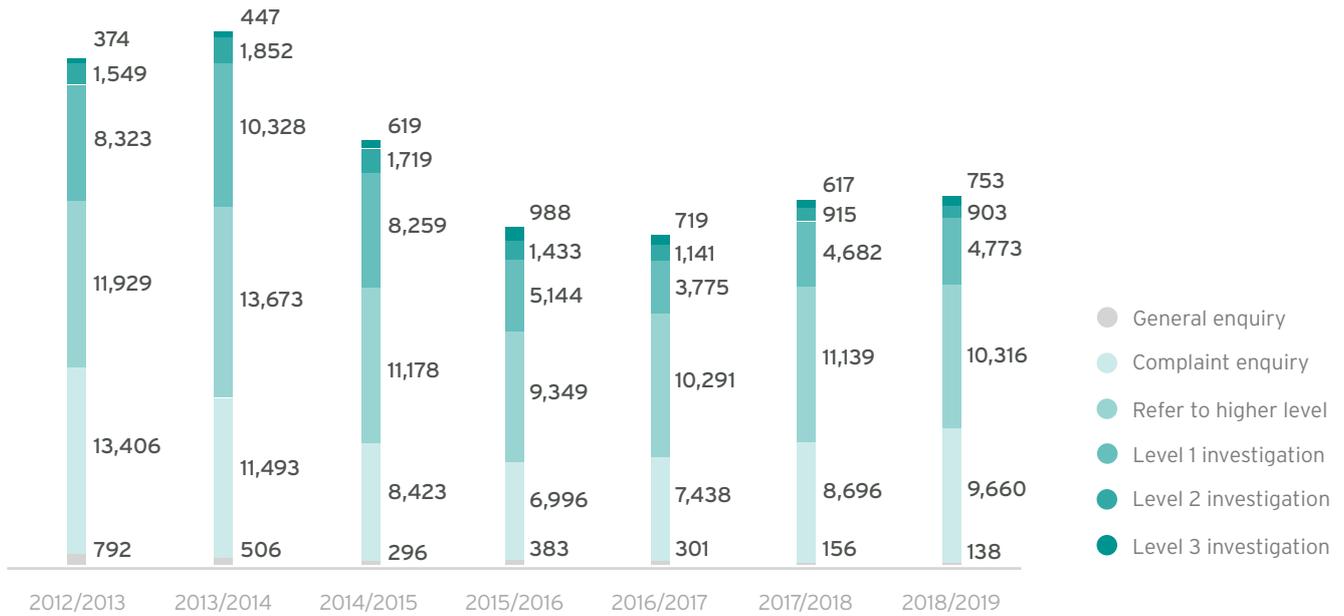
### Trends in credit complaints



# Resolutions and outcomes

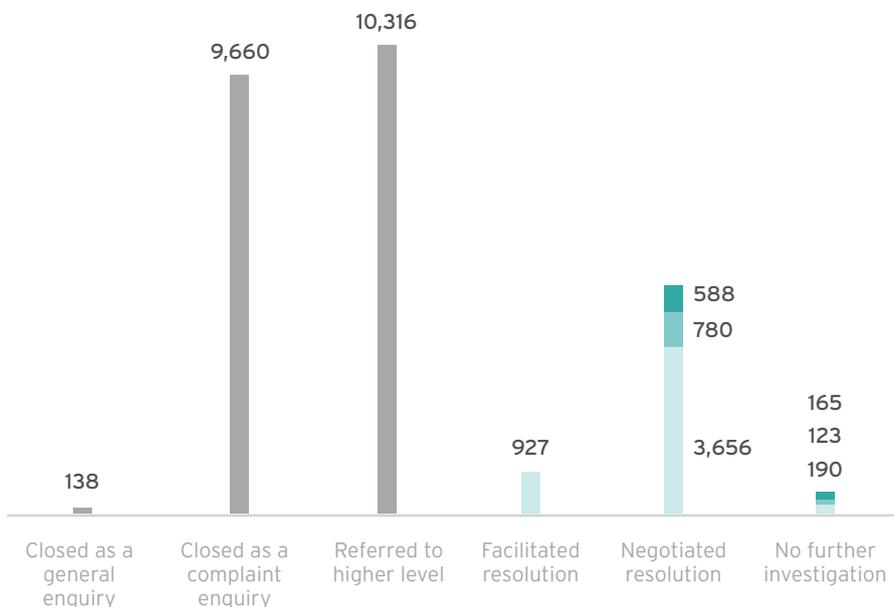
## Complaint closures

from 2012/2013 - 2018/2019



## Complaint resolutions and outcomes

● Level 1 ● Level 2 ● Level 3



### Facilitated resolutions

When the customer and provider work with us to resolve non-complex complaints.

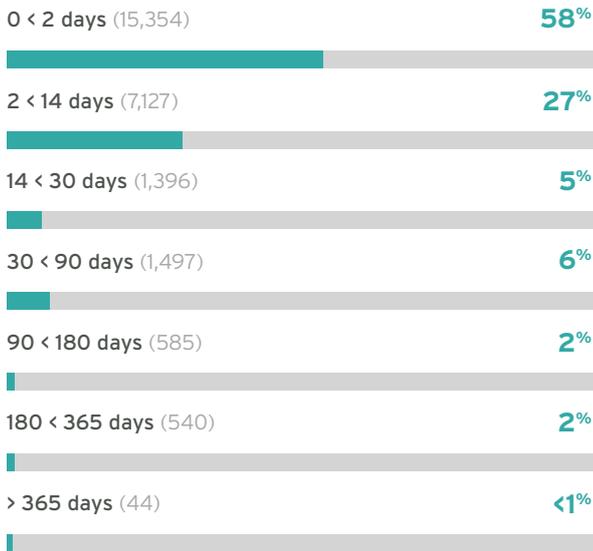
### Negotiated resolutions

A full investigation when we are actively involved in negotiating a fair and reasonable outcome for both parties.

### No further investigation

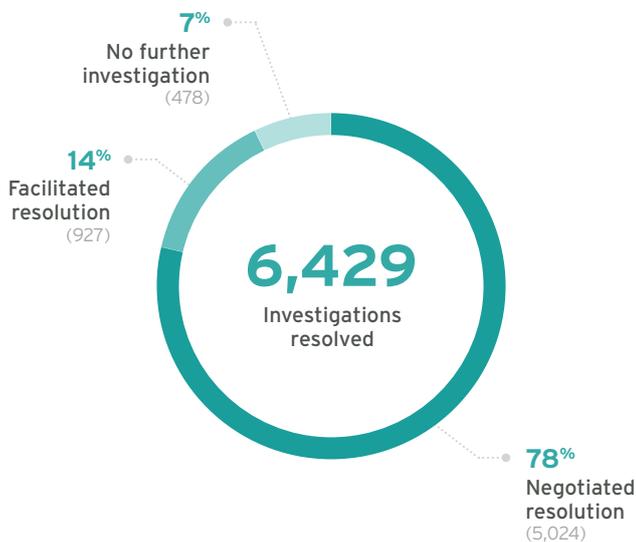
When our investigation finds that the provider's position is fair and reasonable, when the customer withdraws a complaint, or where the customer does not keep in contact with us.

### Time taken to resolve complaints



**90%** of complaints were resolved within 30 days

### Investigation outcomes

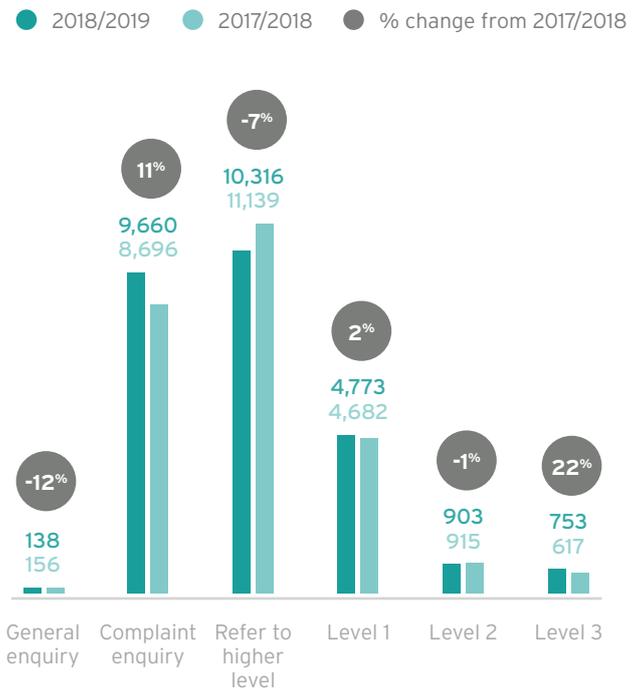


### No wrong door

When a customer contacts us before they speak to their energy or water provider in the first instance, we provide advice about their rights and responsibilities and refer them to their energy or water provider. Where customers require assistance that is outside EWON's jurisdiction, we work closely with other organisations and refer customers as required.

Referral	No.
Member contact centre	4,596
Energy or water payment assistance scheme/ community agency	1,517
Financial counsellor	919
Member affordability team	771
Fair Trading/NCAT	599
AER/energymadeeasy.com.au	559
Another Ombudsman	361
Other Government agency	342
Legal/tenancy advisor	312
Private contractor	224
Department of Planning and Environment/Minister	32
IPART	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,249</b>

### Complaint closure trends



# Testing our accessibility and effectiveness

As part of EWON's commitment to continuous improvement, we periodically conduct customer satisfaction surveys. This is also in accordance with the Australian Government's Benchmarks for Industry-based Customer Dispute Resolution.

In 2018/2019, we engaged an independent consultant who contacted over 2,300 customers via email or phone to ask for feedback about EWON's investigation performance. We also continued our quarterly in-house survey of customers who we referred to their provider's specialist dispute resolution team to resolve their complaints.

## Customer satisfaction survey of investigated complaints

This survey assessed EWON's complaint investigation performance by:

- > measuring customer satisfaction with EWON's complaint-handling service
- > benchmarking performance against previous survey results
- > identifying opportunities for service improvement.

The sample included 2,374 customers whose complaints were finalised between July and December 2018. We received 510 responses, a response rate of 21%.

We received a commendable Net Promoter Score\* (NPS) of +24, which indicates the service experienced by EWON customers resulted in them becoming advocates and promoters of EWON. While positive, the NPS is lower than the +40 achieved in 2017 and +33 in 2016. We are not surprised by this result, given that during the survey period we resolved aged complaints from a backlog built up in 2017/2018 when complaint numbers increased substantially. Timeliness is a critical issue from a customer satisfaction perspective.

Sixty percent of customers were satisfied with the outcome of their complaint and 81% were satisfied with how EWON staff explained the outcome. However, results were lower than they were in previous surveys for how we handled complaints, including the effort made to fully understand the complaint and the timeliness of dealing with complaints. Overall, 65% of customers were satisfied with our service, down from 75% in the last survey which was conducted in 2017.

### Improving our performance

The detailed results highlight areas for improvement, which we have been addressing for some time by:

- > undertaking an internal productivity review and implementing efficiencies identified through that process
- > upgrading our Complaints Management System
- > engaging an external training provider to conduct telephone coaching and training

## Investigated complaints survey

● Negative ● Neutral ● Positive

Ease of making a complaint



Courteous and helpful staff



Explanation of outcome



EWON is easy to find



Effort made by EWON staff to understand the complaint



EWON's approach was practical and sensible



Knowledge, skills, expertise of EWON staff



Fairness and impartiality of EWON's handling of the complaint



The way EWON handled the complaint overall



EWON kept the customer informed during complaint process



Overall satisfaction with the outcome of complaint



Note: Totals may not add to 100% due to omission of 'not sure/don't know' responses

- > implementing regular escalation meetings with the General Manager Investigations and Ombudsman.

Additional strategies have been adopted and will be completed as part of the 2019/2020 Business Plan. These include further enhancements to our Complaint Management System to optimise efficiency and effectiveness and reviewing our complaint-handling processes. We will undertake twice yearly surveys of customers whose complaints are investigated to track our progress in improving customer satisfaction.

## Customer satisfaction survey of referred complaints

In most cases, when a customer contacts EWON we offer to refer them to their provider's specialist complaints team. This direct contact from the provider's senior dispute resolution staff provides another opportunity to resolve customer issues directly. We find this process can also empower the customer in their future dealings with their provider.

We worked hard throughout 2018/2019 to improve our customers' experience with the 'refer to higher level' process. We implemented several internal initiatives and worked closely with our members, including running popular webinars on best practice internal dispute resolution, to maximise their effectiveness. In the first half of 2018/2019, 80% of survey respondents said they were contacted by their provider within five days of the referral. During the second half of 2018/2019, this increased to 87%. Respondents who rated the overall customer service of the provider as excellent or good increased from 18% to 22% in the second half of 2018/2019. There's some way to go for many members.

We ensure customers we refer back to their provider know they can contact us

again if they are not satisfied with the outcome. However, if we do not hear from the customer, we do not know if they are satisfied or if they decided not to return to us for another reason. Therefore, we conduct quarterly surveys to seek customer feedback to ascertain:

- > the level of satisfaction with EWON's advice and service
- > if members adhered to the agreed referral process which requires them to contact the customer within five business days
- > if the outcome of the complaint was agreed by both the customer and the provider.

Results of these surveys indicated a high satisfaction with both EWON and the referral process throughout 2018/2019. We were especially pleased with the number of customers who said they would recommend our service, evidenced by a high annual average NPS of +55 for 2018/2019 - three points above our 2017/2018 average of +52. Given the consistency of the results over the past two years, we will move from quarterly to twice yearly surveying in 2019/2020.



## EWON awareness surveys

It is important that energy and water consumers are aware of their right to access EWON's service if something goes wrong and they cannot get assistance through their provider or other channels.

To establish awareness of provider internal dispute resolution processes and our service, we have an extensive community outreach program, engage with stakeholders and undertake communications activities. Our members are also required to promote EWON to their customers. It can be difficult to gauge how effective these awareness raising activities are.

Since 2016/2017, Energy Consumers Australia included two questions in its half yearly consumer sentiment surveys, designed to measure the level of prompted and unprompted

awareness of energy Ombudsman services amongst consumers.

The first question gauges unprompted awareness by asking "If you had a complaint about your electricity or gas services which you could not resolve by talking to your retailer or network company, which people or organisation[s] would you contact?" The percentage of respondents that mentioned 'Ombudsman' in their answer fell from 43% in 2017/2018 to 39% in 2018/2019. Nine percent answered specifically 'Energy/Industry Ombudsman' down from 10% in 2017/2018.

The second question gauges prompted awareness by asking consumers "How familiar are you with an organisation called the Energy Ombudsman, which assists consumers with complaints

about energy?" The percentage of people who responded that they were familiar or very familiar with the term 'Energy Ombudsman' in NSW increased from 30% in 2017/2018 to 31% in 2018/2019.

We will continue to review our communication strategies to build NSW consumer awareness of providers' internal dispute/complaints handling processes and our services.

# Case study

## Customer's compensation claim disputed after transformer explosion

Mrs Mason's appliances were damaged extensively after an energy distributor's transformer exploded, causing an unplanned supply disruption.

The distributor's technicians who attended the scene advised Mrs Mason that she should submit a claim for any damage. Mrs Mason called the distributor and was told to get the repairs done and then send the bills and claim form. Mrs Mason did this and lodged a claim for the work, substantiated with receipts, for just over \$9,000.

The distributor accepted liability for the claim on the basis that the event was due to defective equipment and equipment failure. It assessed the depreciated value of the customer's losses at around \$7,000. However, the distributor only offered Mrs Mason a

capped amount of \$5,000, as detailed in its Deemed Standard Connection Contract (DSCC), which reflects the provisions of the *National Energy Retail Law (Adoption) Regulation 2013*. The customer's insurer also declined her claim and referred her back to her distributor on the basis that it had accepted responsibility.

Mrs Mason called EWON as she considered the distributor should pay the \$7,000 which was the original assessed value of the claim. Mrs Mason also wanted the distributor to consider paying the replacement value of her hot water system which would cost as much to repair as to replace, and to replace the garage door which could not be repaired as parts were not available.

### EWON's investigation

The distributor had agreed to reimburse Mrs Mason for losses to the maximum amount of \$5,000 as per Section 8 of the Adoption Regulation.

During its investigation, EWON noted Section 8(7) of the Regulation which states:

*Nothing in this clause affects the operation of any determination that may be made under an energy*

*ombudsman scheme.*

This rule indicates that the limit of \$5,000 does not apply if the Ombudsman decides that the distributor should reimburse the customer for a higher amount. As the distributor accepted liability, EWON advised that it was appropriate that the distributor reimburse Mrs Mason the full amount of its assessment of \$7,000.

### The distributor's response

The distributor said that the functions and powers of EWON must be exercised in accordance with NSW National Energy Retail Law (NERL) and National Energy Retail Rules in NSW (NERR). Given that the DSCC is made in accordance with NSW NERL and NERR, EWON must exercise its functions and powers with respect to resolving complaints in accordance

with the DSCC, including the Liability Clause.

The distributor's position was that clause 8(7) of the Regulation does not allow EWON, when considering or making a decision with respect to a complaint, to disregard the Liability Clause. Therefore, it did not change its offer of settlement of \$5,000 to finalise Mrs Mason's claim.

## Legal opinion

EWON obtained legal advice regarding the amount the Ombudsman could determine be paid. EWON's legal counsel advised that the Ombudsman is permitted to make a binding decision requiring a distributor to pay a customer under a DSCC more than the liability cap in that contract because:

- › while EWON's powers are subject to the NERL, the NERL does not provide a statutory liability cap for small customer contracts. Rather the NERL permits, but does not require, a distributor to include such a cap in its DSCC
- › the plain meaning of the language of clause 8(7) of the Regulation is that the right to include a liability cap in a customer contract does not affect any determination that EWON may make
- › while EWON is probably obliged to take into account the terms of the DSCC, including the liability cap, when making a decision about a dispute, it is not required to make a finding about, or restricted by, contractual (or other) legal rights when deciding what it considers to be 'fair and reasonable'.

## Resolution

The distributor did not agree with EWON's legal advice, however, it reimbursed the customer over \$7,000 for damage sustained from the outage. This payment was made up of \$5,000 as per the terms of the DSCC, plus over \$2,600 as an ex gratia payment.

The distributor also agreed to provide an apology acknowledging the incident and the time taken to resolve the complaint. This decision by the distributor meant that the complaint was not referred to the Ombudsman for binding decision.

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**Category:** Level 3 investigation

**Issues:** Damage/loss due to supply off, customer service – failure to consult or inform

**Outcome:** Negotiated resolution – compensated by provider

## Voltage Variation Working Group

In conjunction with the three NSW electricity distributors, EWON set up a Working Group to establish a guideline in relation to customer claims for damages as a result of voltage variation. The guideline will set out an agreed approach to be followed by distributors when engaging with

customers, and will also outline the processes for the distributor and EWON to use if the customer escalates the complaint to EWON. The guideline is expected to be finalised in late 2019. We look forward to a new approach for the handling of what can be very complex complaints.

# EWON's response to consumer issues

## EWON is committed to increasing consumer protections and addressing issues that negatively impact consumers

We identify consumer issues through our complaint management and community engagement activities. We use this valuable information to influence policy development through our submissions and advice to regulators and government. We also work with providers to encourage them to adopt best industry practice in complaints management.

## Consumer Data Right

A Consumer Data Right (CDR) is being developed by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) at the request of the Federal Government. Its purpose is to give consumers greater control over their data, empowering them to choose when to share their data and for which purposes. The CDR is due to be introduced to the energy sector during 2020, depending on the timing of legislation being passed.

The Ombudsman, Janine Young, provided evidence at the

Economics Legislation Committee about energy complaints and systemic issues to the the Senate Enquiry into Treasury Laws Amendment (Consumer Data Right) Bill 2019.

EWON's role in dispute resolution related to the CDR will be dependent on which body is selected to be the holder and distributor of customer data. We have been engaging with the ACCC on this matter and we will continue to do so as the mechanisms for the CDR are further developed.

## New technology

The provision of energy is undergoing significant changes. Technological advances are restructuring the energy industry from a centralised generation and distribution system to a decentralised system. This is being driven by the rapid expansion of solar generation, the introduction of battery storage as well as other emerging technology. Energy providers – whether they are networks, distributors or retailers – are already planning for this future.

In the future, community utility providers may install and operate smart microgrids on residences which they own. The community utility provider may install and control air conditioning and hot water systems, in return for lower energy prices and annual dividends to the residents. Other microgrids supported by a centralised solar generation plant, battery storage and gas generators are also being established for remote/individual communities.

Amid this change, the area getting the least attention is consumer protection. The consumer protection framework for energy was built around the highly centralised (and regulated) systems of the past. These protections urgently need to be updated to encompass the wide range of new energy products and services to ensure that consumers, especially those who are experiencing financial vulnerability, are not further at risk.

Key consumer issues arising as a result of the growing range of behind-the-meter services include:

- › inappropriate or unaffordable finance being offered to purchase systems
- › misleading and high-pressure sales tactics

- › product faults and poor performance
- › a lack of free or affordable dispute resolution
- › business closures which leave consumers without warranties or support for solar/battery purchases.

We are currently limited in what we can do when customers approach us about these issues. Our jurisdiction is restricted to energy provided under the National Energy Customer Framework and most new products and services are not covered by current legislation. Customers experiencing problems arising from faulty solar installations have limited options for redress. Industry self-regulation has a very limited participation rate, with the greater majority of solar installers not joining the relevant voluntary code. The only other option for consumers is the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal, which is formal and often requires expert technological reports that can be difficult to obtain and cost prohibitive.

As governments and regulators consider the significant technological changes happening in the energy industry, EWON will continue to argue for the strongest possible consumer protections, because despite changing forms of delivery, energy remains an essential service. In response to the changes, the Australia & New Zealand Energy and Water Ombudsman Network (ANZEWON) members commissioned a joint research project, 'What will energy consumers expect of an energy and water Ombudsman in 2020, 2025, and 2030?' The research explores how ANZEWON member offices operate, respond to changing consumer needs, ensure best practice and remain fit for purpose in the evolving landscape.

## Affordability and financial hardship

In March 2018, the Australian Energy Regulator (AER) submitted a proposal to the Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC) to amend the National Energy Retail Rules (NERR). It proposed the AER develop a Customer Hardship Policy Guideline (the Guideline) for retailers to use when developing affordability programs for vulnerable customers. In November 2018, the AEMC made an amendment to the NERR requiring the AER to proceed with the Guideline.

EWON provided feedback during the AEMC's consultation processes and the AER's Guideline development. Our submissions drew on our experience assisting consumers to manage energy affordability and engaging with financially vulnerable consumers in metropolitan, regional and remote communities.

The Guideline was released in March 2019 and now requires retailers to include standard statements that require specific and actionable commitments for them to follow. They are also required to put steps in place to:

- › help customers manage debt
- › actively engage them throughout their affordability program experience, and
- › provide them with clear, consistent and transparent information about customer rights and retailer responsibilities.

### Retailer affordability programs to be more accessible

Our submissions to the AEMC supported the AER's proposal for a mandatory Hardship Guideline. We outlined how customers coming to EWON continue to face the same barriers to receiving financial assistance as they have for many years. EWON argued that many retailers do not appropriately identify customers experiencing affordability issues, place unreasonable conditions on a customer's entry into an affordability program, and do not take a customer's capacity to pay into account when negotiating payment plans.

Our submissions to the AER during the Guideline's development called for:

- › the standards statements to make it clear that retailers should consider what a customer can afford to pay when discussing a payment plan with them
- › customer history of broken payment plans and reduced incomes to be included as indicators of affordability issues in retailer hardship policies
- › customers to be given clear reasons when they are denied access to an affordability program or removed

from a program and provided with details of their energy Ombudsman scheme

- › prevention of unreasonable entry conditions to affordability programs by retailers.

The AER included all of these conditions in the Guideline.

### Disconnection for non-payment recognised as an indicator of financial vulnerability

Some customers disconnected for non-payment are excluded from accessing retailer affordability programs or payment plans until they meet certain conditions - usually involving large upfront payments. This often occurs when an energy retailer separates its obligation to assist customers needing financial support from its processes for managing customers who have been disconnected for non-payment.

Our submissions to the AEMC and the AER highlighted this systemic and unreasonable barrier to making financial assistance accessible to energy consumers in, or at risk of being in, crisis. Any conversation with a customer who has been disconnected for non-payment should trigger a referral to, and assessment by, the retailer's affordability team. We welcome the AER's decision to adopt disconnection for non-payment as one of the formal hardship indicators included in the standard statements that must be included in all retailer affordability policies.

### Using non-stigmatising language such as 'affordability' instead of 'hardship' will encourage consumers to engage with their retailer

Our submissions to the AEMC and the AER argued that the word 'affordability' should replace 'hardship' wherever possible, noting it may be necessary to use 'hardship' in the Guideline when referring to legislation.

We were pleased with the widespread recognition that the language used in policies and programs is critical for encouraging customers who experience financial vulnerability to self-identify and engage with their retailer. Offering 'energy affordability programs' rather than 'hardship programs' may also help initiate easier conversations between retailer staff and customers who need these programs. The Guideline notes retailers may elect to use language other than the term 'hardship' when communicating with customers. EWON will continue to promote non-stigmatising language when assisting customers who need financial assistance.

# EWON's response to consumer issues

## Systemic issues

The EWON Charter requires that we use our real time insights from our complaints data to identify systemic issues and, where appropriate, investigate them.

We broadly define a systemic issue as a policy, practice or process of a company or companies that has the potential to negatively impact numerous customers and lead to complaints and disputes. A systemic issue may also arise from a regulatory issue that causes confusion, conflicting interpretations and/or unforeseen consequences, or an issue that is outside the control of providers or the industry generally, but is one which EWON can play a role in resolving.

### Systemic errors with monthly estimated bills

A customer complained to EWON that he was experiencing ongoing billing errors in his quarterly electricity bills. EWON's investigation of the complaint revealed that the retailer had not reconciled estimated monthly bills issued to the customer with actual quarterly meter readings provided by the meter data provider. The billing issue affected customers with manually read interval meters.

As a result of our investigation, the retailer advised us that 109 customers were affected by the issue and had been undercharged by a total of \$18,894.20. The retailer decided not to recover any outstanding balances. An additional 82 customers were overcharged by a total of \$13,853.83. Each of these customers received a credit adjustment on their next bill and an email notification alerting them to the issue.

### Retailer's approach to disconnections and payment plans requires review

EWON wrote to an energy retailer several times during 2018, highlighting our concern about its approach to disconnection complaints and responding to customers with affordability concerns. We raised several issues with the retailer, including its apparent reluctance to consider a customer's capacity to pay when negotiating payment plans and its refusal to provide flexible options for customers who had been disconnected for non-payment.

We continued to engage with the retailer throughout 2018, which resulted in it formally adopting the AER's Sustainable Payments Plan Framework. The retailer also undertook to provide customers who are at risk of disconnection with more flexible options and offer these customers a referral to its affordability program. The retailer also advised it would discuss flexible payment arrangements and referrals to its affordability program with customers who had been disconnected for non-payment.

25

systemic issue investigations opened this financial year

17

systemic issues reviewed and closed after investigation

18

issues remain under investigation

### Retailer requires customers to complete a written form to apply for the Low-Income Household Rebate

A customer complained to EWON about billing errors on his electricity account. Our investigation of the complaint revealed that the customer was eligible for the NSW Government's Low-Income Household Rebate but was not receiving the rebate on his bills. The retailer advised us this was because it had not received a written application form from the customer.

We advised the retailer that the NSW Social Programs for Energy Code gives the right to customers to apply for the rebate in person, in writing or by telephone. We noted that customers who apply for the rebate over the phone are not required to sign a form. The retailer reviewed its processes and identified a gap in its communications with some customers. The retailer implemented new training and processes to require written consent for rebates only when verbal verification cannot be obtained.

### Retailer refuses to make standing offer to customers despite being financially responsible for the premises

EWON received multiple complaints from customers who had been told they could not open an energy account with the retailer due to a failed credit check. In each case, it was apparent that the retailer was already financially responsible for the premises. Our investigation revealed that the energy retailer refused to make a standing offer to a customer despite being the designated retailer under the National Energy Retail Law (NERL). In one case, the customer was subsequently disconnected.

We contacted the retailer about the practice of refusing accounts to new customers when it is the designated retailer for the area. After reviewing case studies provided by us, the retailer said they were isolated incidents. It provided additional training to staff involved and updated its training more broadly. The retailer's compliance team is monitoring this issue to ensure all processes are followed correctly going forward.

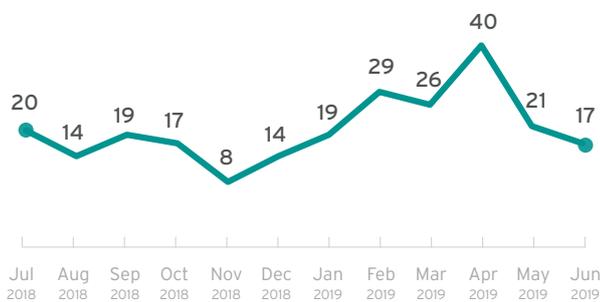
## Embedded networks

### The way we look at embedded network issues is changing

Historically, EWON has recorded complaints from customers of embedded networks based on the type of exempt entity providing the services – either a ‘Residential Park Operator’ or an ‘Other Exempt Seller’ (including residential buildings or complexes and retirement villages). However, the retail landscape for embedded network services has now changed significantly, and embedded network services are commonly provided by both exempt entities and authorised retailers.

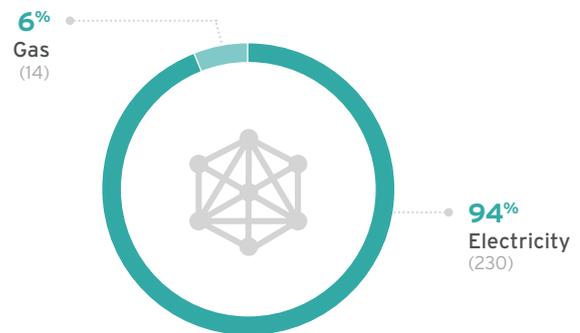
In January 2019 we began recording a new contract type unique to embedded networks in our Complaint Management System. This means that if a customer or their retailer advises that the customer is living in a residence in an embedded network, we can identify the complaint as relating to embedded network services. This allows us to report on the number of complaints we receive from embedded network customers, regardless of what type of retailer is providing their energy services.

### Embedded network complaints from July 2018 to June 2019



### Embedded network type

There are no water embedded networks



### A new regulatory framework for embedded networks

In 2017 the AEMC conducted a review of the regulatory arrangements for embedded networks, at the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Energy Council’s request. The AEMC concluded that the existing framework is no longer fit for purpose, because most embedded network customers are not able to access retail competition or important consumer protections.

In June 2019 the AEMC published its final recommendations for updating the regulatory framework for embedded networks. It includes proposed changes to the National Electricity Rules (NER) and National Energy Retail Rules (NERR), and recommendations for the COAG Energy Council

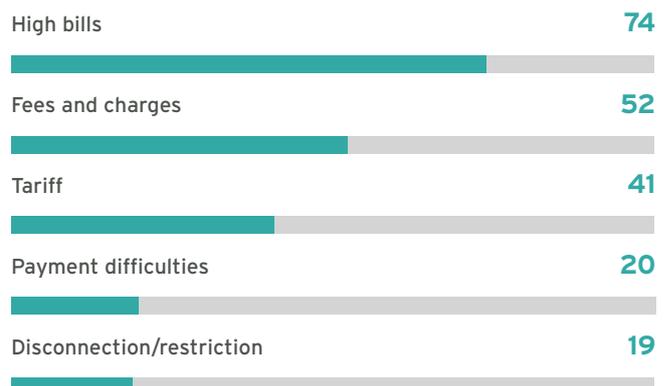
regarding changes to the National Electricity Law (NEL) and National Energy Retail Law (NERL).

Under the proposed framework, embedded network service providers will be required to register with the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO), and electricity on-sellers will be required to obtain an off-market retailer authorisation from the AER. The rationale behind the new framework is that requiring on-sellers to obtain an authorisation will allow consumer protections for embedded network customers to be closely aligned with those of standard supply customers under the NERL and NERR. The AEMC expects the regulatory changes to commence from mid-2020, with a lengthy transition period. Legacy embedded networks currently subject to registrable exemptions will be transitioned to the new framework.

### Complaint numbers for all embedded network providers

Authorised (EWON member)	Complaints
Electricity	81
Gas	8
<b>Exempt seller (non-member)</b>	
Electricity	80
Gas	6
<b>Residential park (non-member)</b>	
Electricity	69

### Top five secondary embedded network issues



# EWON's response to consumer issues

## Embedded networks

### Hot water embedded networks

Jemena, the gas network operator for much of NSW, is proposing to stop providing hot water metering for greenfield developments from 1 July 2020. This means that Jemena will only offer boundary metering for sites with centralised hot water systems, and the service within the development will be managed and billed by embedded network providers.

In NSW Jemena has traditionally provided hot water metering services for new buildings with central hot water systems. Customers are then billed by their retailer for the gas used to heat the water, rather than the litres of hot water delivered to their home by the common hot water system. This means customers with a hot water meter are covered by the energy-specific consumer protections contained within the National Energy Customer Framework (NECF).

The AER does not consider the sale of bulk hot water a 'sale of energy' under the Retail Law and Retail Rules. This

means that embedded network providers selling hot water to residential customers, based on a price per litre consumed, are unregulated in NSW apart from the application of the Australian Consumer Law. However, hot water is an essential service and problems related to affordability, disconnection, or quality of supply significantly impact on households. Therefore, EWON is of the view that it should be covered by the energy-specific consumer protections contained in NECF.

In its Report *Updating regulatory arrangements for embedded networks* and the *2019 Retail Energy Competition Review*, the AEMC states that it will undertake a review and consider whether changes to the NECF are necessary to make consumer protections fit for purpose and reduce barriers to innovation. This review will likely analyse the regulatory approach for new non-traditional energy services and products - for example, distributed energy resources and bulk hot water. EWON is closely monitoring the progress of this review.

## Digital meters

Community and regulatory concern over digital meter installation delays during 2018 led to the NSW Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) establishing a review into the retailer rollout of digital meters. EWON provided extensive information and analysis based on our complaint data.

Following a rule change proposal by the Federal Energy Minister, about which EWON made two submissions, the AEMC introduced new rules which came into effect in February 2019, establishing clear timeframes for retailers to install meters. These rules aim to address the significant consumer detriment associated with delays in installing meters for new supply addresses and where customers had installed solar, air conditioning or controlled load hot water.

Initially the retailer response to meeting these new timeframes was not as effective as expected, however, during the fourth quarter of 2018/2019 complaints about installation delays began to decrease. Despite this decline, there are still too many customers waiting far too long for a new meter,

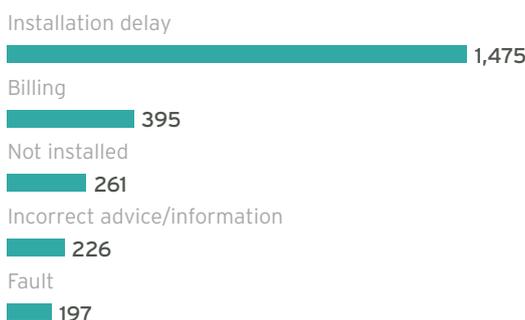
particularly in regional, rural and remote NSW.

As the rollout of digital meters continues, EWON is beginning to receive complaints related to new digital meter issues. These include faulty installations, data accuracy and costs associated with new meters. Many installation complaints are related to faulty controlled load or solar connections to the new meter. The number of customers complaining about billing data has also increased.

When customers upgrade their technology, some additional costs are to be expected. However, for those who live in a mobile black spot preventing digital meters being read remotely, having to pay ongoing meter reading charges is an unwelcome and costly addition to their energy bill.

From 1 January 2019 the AER began collecting data on digital meter complaints from retailers. We will monitor this and our own complaint data to assist industry to identify where processes need to improve and, as with meter installation timeframes, where regulation needs to be considered.

### Digital meter complaints by issue



### Digital meter complaints

from July 2018 to June 2019



# Case study

## Residential park customer disputes the time limit for paying a bill

Mr Janssen submitted an online complaint to EWON explaining that he lived in a residential park and had always received his electricity bills from the park operator. In September 2018 Mr Janssen was told that the park operator had outsourced electricity billing and that he would now receive his bills from a billing agent.

In October 2018 Mr Janssen received his first bill from the billing agent and it only gave him 14 days to pay. The park operator had always given him 21 days to pay and he knew that under the NSW *Residential (Lend Lease) Communities Act*, he should be given 21 days to pay.

Our investigation of the issue identified that:

- › Under the *Residential (Land Lease) Communities Act 2013 (NSW)*, residential park residents must be given at least 21 days to pay a bill (s77(2)(b)).
- › Under the Australian Energy Regulator's (*Retail Exempt Selling Guideline*) an exempt seller, which is someone on-selling energy to customers within

an embedded network such as a residential park operator, must allow customers at least 13 days from the date the bill is issued to pay the bill, so in effect 14 days.

We raised the complaint with the billing agent, although it was not a member of EWON. The billing agent advised that it considered 14 days appropriate as it thought it was only bound by the exempt selling guideline, not by the NSW legislation.

We disagreed with the billing agent and advised it that it must allow residents in residential parks 21 days to pay, in accordance with the *Residential (Land Lease) Communities Act*.

After further discussions with the billing agent, it confirmed it would provide residents in all the residential parks it operates in, 21 days to pay, in accordance with the *Residential (Lend Lease) Communities Act*.

This complaint was also included on our systemic issues register.

**Category:** Complaint enquiry

**Issues:** Billing format and service availability

**Outcome:** Closed as a complaint enquiry

# Ombudsman engagement highlights

The Ombudsman's direct engagement with stakeholders and communities across NSW expands our strong networks, increases awareness of our services and builds community knowledge and trust in what we do. It also allows the Ombudsman to hear firsthand about issues that impact consumers.



Janine Young, Ombudsman, speaking at the EDR Forum



Janine Young, Ombudsman, at the Bring Your Bills Day in Woy Woy

## Conferences, speeches and events

- › EWON's Anti-Poverty Week forums held in Wollongong and Bega
- › National Consumer Conference/Ruby Hutchinson Memorial Lecture by Mr Edward Santow, Human Rights Commissioner
- › Energy Networks Australia Asset Management Seminar
- › EDR Forum at the Financial Counselling Australia annual conference
- › The Energy Charter launch and workshops
- › Seniors Day at the Royal Agricultural Show
- › Energy Consumers Australia Foresighting Forum - presentation on the ethical Implications of the Consumer Data Right.

## Working with government and regulators

### Australian Energy Regulator

Customer Consultative Group Meeting

### Council of Australian Governments

Energy Council Stakeholder Roundtable

### Australian Energy Regulator (AER) Stakeholder Forum

Update on AER's Compliance and Enforcement Statement of Approach and discussion about its compliance and enforcement priority setting

### Senate Enquiry – Consumer Data Right

The Ombudsman, together with Ombudsman from the Australian Financial Complaints Authority, Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman and Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria), provided evidence at the Economics Legislation Committee reviewing the Treasury Laws Amendment.

## Peak/consumer body engagement

- › NSW Business Chamber
- › Energy Consumers Australia
- › NSW Council of Social Services

## Aboriginal community projects and engagement

- › Yarning Circle at the Financial Counselling Australia annual conference
- › 2018 National NAIDOC Awards Ceremony
- › Gosford NAIDOC Week event
- › Malabugilmah Street Lights Project
- › EWON Bring Your Bills Day events in Parkes, Coonamble, Dubbo and Queanbeyan, Batemans Bay, Nowra and Ballina
- › Yarning Circle at the Financial Counsellors Association of NSW annual conference.

## Collaboration and partnerships

### NSW Fair Trading

Quarterly meetings to discuss common issues and complaint referral processes

### Australian Financial Complaints Authority and Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman

The two Ombudsman offices joined EWON's Bring Your Bills Days in Western NSW

### Community Housing Industry Association

Energy and water training for housing managers and tenant advocates with the Public Interest Advocacy Centre, Lismore

### Voltage Variation Working Group

Development of principles for handling Voltage Variation claims with Ausgrid, Endeavour Energy and Essential Energy

### Jemena Consultative Council

Observer

### Ausgrid Consultative Council

Observer.

## High level committees

### AS/NZS 10002:2014 Review Committee

Review of the QR15 'Guideline for Complaint Management in Organisations'.



Janine Young, Ombudsman, with fellow ANZEWO members



Janine Young, Ombudsman, and Liz Devlin, Deputy Secretary, Department of Planning and Environment



Janine Young, Ombudsman, at the Bring Your Bills Day in Bega

# Government and regulators

In 2018/2019, EWON continued to work with government agencies and regulators to update them on industry trends and issues identified through our complaint-handling, outreach and stakeholder engagement activities. We also developed reports and submissions to inform energy and water policy decisions.

## Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC)

We made a joint Australia & New Zealand Energy and Water Ombudsman Network (ANZEWON) submission to the ACCC's *Data access models for energy data* consultation, which was part of its development of the Customer Data Right (CDR). While we could not comment in detail on the efficacy of the three data access models proposed, we recommended an approach designed to minimise risk. We look forward to future discussion on the dispute resolution aspects of the CDR.

## Australian Energy Regulator (AER)

We provide quarterly reports to the AER and meet with its staff regularly, both individually and with other state Ombudsman schemes. The quarterly report includes case studies detailing potential breaches of the rules which the AER compliance team can investigate.

In 2018/2019, our work with the AER was extensive due to its development of the Hardship Guideline which will govern the content of retailers' affordability programs intended to provide support to vulnerable customers. Our three submissions supported the general aims of the policy, while making detailed suggestions about standardised wording and specific, actionable and measurable commitments that are clear and unambiguous for both customers and frontline retailer customer service staff.

We also made a submission to the AER's development of a Default Market Offer (DMO) which now acts as a cap on retailers' standing offers. Our submission welcomed the potential benefits of the DMO; however, we expressed concern that it was only applied to flat tariffs, not time of use tariffs.

## Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART)

In 2018/2019 we provided quarterly reports to IPART and contributed to its reviews of:

- > metering practices in NSW
- > Sydney Water's Operating Licence.

## Regulators' meeting

EWON held quarterly meetings with the AER, the AEMC and IPART. The meetings are a useful forum to share updates on systemic issues, complaint trends and shared projects.

## Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC)

Our engagement with the AEMC included:

- > quarterly reporting
- > providing statistics and case studies which inform AEMC rule changes and reviews, including the Annual Retail Competition Review
- > regular meetings individually, or with other state Ombudsman schemes, involving the AER, the AEMC and IPART
- > attending its Consumer Priorities Forum and workshops
- > holding discussions on reviews and rule change proposals.

We also made submissions to the AEMC in response to its reviews of:

- > metering installation timeframes
- > advance notice of price changes
- > estimated meter reads
- > the regulatory frameworks for stand-alone power systems
- > strengthening protections for customers experiencing affordability issues
- > 'advanced meter' communications
- > start and end reads for customers with 'advanced interval meters'
- > the regulatory framework for embedded networks.

## Government

EWON provided quarterly reports to and met with the Energy Division of the former NSW Department of Planning and Environment. We also met with NSW Fair Trading quarterly. In 2018/2019 we made submissions to:

- > NSW Fair Trading's review into easy and transparent trading in NSW
- > the former NSW Department of Planning and Environment's changes to the Social Programs for Energy Code.

In November 2018, the Ombudsman signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Planning and Environment aimed at promoting effective communication, cooperation and coordination between the two organisations. In March 2019 we delivered an information workshop to departmental staff about EWON's work.

At the Federal Government level, we made submissions to the Department of Social Services review into the coordination and funding of financial counselling services across Australia.

## Office of Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC)

As an approved External Dispute Resolution Scheme under the Privacy Act, EWON reports on complaints relating to privacy and credit reporting to the OAIC. For the 2018/2019 financial year, 1,029 complaints related to customers concerns about credit reporting and 132 potential privacy breaches by providers were reported.

# Collaborating with our peers

The Ombudsman, Janine Young, is a member of the Australian and New Zealand Ombudsman Association (ANZOA) and continued to sit on its Executive Committee in 2018/2019. The Ombudsman is also a member of the Australia & New Zealand Energy and Water Ombudsman Network (ANZEWON).

## ANZOA

ANZOA provides a valuable peer forum for its members, all of whom meet accepted high standards of independence, impartiality and effectiveness, and observe the Benchmarks for Industry-based Customer Dispute Resolution (the CDR Benchmarks).

ANZOA has eight interest groups. Staff working in similar roles across the offices of ANZOA's members, meet regularly to discuss the successes and challenges the offices are facing, as well as opportunities to collaborate. EWON staff participate in the following interest groups:

### Complaints Management

Focuses on complaint-handling best practice, approaches to consumer vulnerability, ideal caseloads, managing and motivating staff when they are under pressure and setting targets and KPIs.

### Public Relations & Communications

This group is facilitated by EWON's Manager Communications & Outreach and shares information about communication strategies and new ways of engaging, as well as discussing communication-related issues any of the offices may be facing.

### Customer Financial Hardship

Discusses Ombudsman approaches and initiatives for dealing with emerging affordability issues.

### Indigenous Engagement

Collaborates on improving complaint-handling practices and procedures for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

### Information Technology for Business

Discusses digital delivery for Ombudsman offices from a customer service point of view.

### People & Development

Provides a forum for sharing information and support on all people processes from induction, recruitment, learning and development, performance and engagement.

### Policy & Research

EWON's Manager Policy & Research facilitates this group which shares information about Ombudsman office policy and research work.

### Systemic Issues & Investigations

Discusses identification and investigation of systemic issues generally, with a focus on issues impacting customers experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, vulnerability.

## ANZEWON

This valuable network provides energy and water Ombudsman services and utilities complaints Commissioners from across Australia and New Zealand the opportunity to work together to explore and address industry and policy developments that affect consumers.

### Expanded jurisdiction working group

Following on from the expanded jurisdiction project established by ANZEWON in 2015, EWON initiated a working group of energy Ombudsman staff in 2017 to collaborate on issues related to the expansion of jurisdictions to include exempt entities providing energy through embedded networks. The group initially included representatives from EWON, the Energy and Water Ombudsman SA (EWOSA), the Energy and Water Ombudsman Queensland (EWOQ) and the Energy and Water Ombudsman Victoria (EWOV). Utilities Disputes in New Zealand and the Tasmanian Ombudsman joined later.

The working group held monthly teleconferences at which each scheme provided an update and shared issues, initiatives and challenges. Throughout 2018 the group continued to be an important forum for collaboration and support, particularly for those schemes (EWON, EWOSA and EWOV) that were in the process of implementing expanded jurisdiction. The group continues to meet regularly.

### Chairs and Ombudsman annual forums

The Chairs and Ombudsman from EWON, EWOQ, EWOSA and EWOV met in February 2019 for the third year, including for the first time the Chair and Commissioner from Utilities Disputes New Zealand. The purpose of these forums is to discuss matters including the changing energy landscape, Consumer Data Right (CDR) and membership growth and engagement strategies related to expanded jurisdiction.

### ANZEWON research project

The energy landscape is changing with the growth of new technologies, different ways of interacting with consumers, a rise in electronic communications, online dispute resolution and ongoing changes in the regulatory environment. In response and following discussion at the Chairs and Ombudsman forums, ANZEWON members commissioned a joint research project, 'What will energy consumers expect of an energy and water Ombudsman in 2020, 2025, and 2030?'

The research explores how ANZEWON member offices operate, respond to changing consumer needs, ensure best practice and remain fit for purpose in the evolving landscape. Sydney University was selected to undertake the research and provide a final report in September 2019.

### Consumer Data Right

Ombudsman, Janine Young, wrote to the Deputy Chair of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission on behalf of ANZEWON, welcoming the concept of a CDR, and agreeing that dispute resolution is an important part of the framework. The letter also expressed concerns over the jurisdictional implications for external dispute resolution resulting from the CDR, and the need to be fully engaged in the establishment of the framework. The Deputy Chair responded to ANZEWON with a commitment to full and early engagement with all Ombudsman offices.

# Case studies

## Incorrect meter data and reads lead to high gas bills

Mrs Freeman first contacted EWON after disputing her bills with her gas provider. She lived alone and used gas for hot water and cooking and felt her \$500 quarterly bills were too high.

Her distributor sent a technician to do a special meter read and advised a report would be sent to her provider. However, the next bill she received was also high and when she enquired about the report with her provider, there were no record of the technician's visit or a report.

EWON referred Mrs Freeman to her provider's specialist dispute resolution team on the basis that it would have her meter tested. She was told she would be contacted in six to eight weeks, once the results were reviewed.

Eight weeks later Mrs Freeman contacted us again and advised she had not received any communication from her provider. She was not sure if the meter had been tested but had since paid another bill for \$1,500. We contacted her gas provider and learned the meter had not been tested as requested by EWON.

We escalated the matter with her provider and Mrs Freeman's meter was removed for testing. Results from the meter test found nothing wrong with it, however, comparison of the bills and meter data showed her provider had billed her on incorrect data and reads.

Mrs Freeman's provider reissued the bills and credited her account for \$2,598. It also offered her a \$100 goodwill gesture in recognition of the poor customer service she received and the length of time it took to resolve her problem. Mrs Freeman accepted the offer and thanked us for our assistance.

## Customer's credit default listing removed after review of voice recordings

Ms O'Connor called EWON upset she was receiving letters from her energy provider demanding payment for her overdue bills. She had set up a payment plan for her gas and electricity accounts, but had overlooked the email confirmation that went to her junk mail until she received a call from her provider's call centre advising of the overdue balance.

She asked to reset the payment plan and offered to pay \$50 a fortnight. Ms O'Connor said the customer service officer did not understand her request and advised her that her account was flagged to be sent to a collection agency.

We referred Ms O'Connor to her provider's specialist dispute resolution team to resolve the matter and told her she could call us again if her problem wasn't resolved. Ms O'Connor returned to EWON explaining her debt of \$175 was transferred to a collection agency and it was pursuing her for payment even though she continued to make payments on the accounts.

Our investigation found the default listing complied with the credit code. However, when we reviewed the voice recordings between Ms O'Connor and her provider, we found it had not sought information about the circumstances that had contributed to her financial vulnerability. Ms O'Connor had not worked for 10 weeks due to an injury that had impacted her capacity to pay. As such, we found the provider's refusal to reinstate the payment plan had not been fair and reasonable.

The provider agreed to remove the default listing and transferred a credit on her gas account to her electricity account. The balance owing on her electricity account was waived and both energy accounts had a zero balance which resolved the complaint.

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**Category:** Level 3 investigation

**Issues:** Billing delay, disputed high bill, customer service – failure to respond

**Outcome:** Negotiated resolution

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**Category:** Level 3 investigation

**Issues:** Debt collection, credit rating, payment arrangement declined

**Outcome:** Negotiated resolution

# Our members

The following companies were members of EWON as at 30 June 2019

1st Energy	Momentum Energy
ActewAGL Retail	Narara Ecovillage
AGL Retail Energy	Next Business Energy
AGL Sales	OC Energy
Alinta Energy	Online Power & Gas (trading as Future X Power)
Allgas Energy	Origin Energy Electricity
amaysim Energy	Origin Energy LPG
Apex Energy	People Energy
Aquacell	Pooled Energy
AquaNet	Power Club
Arc Energy	Powerdirect
Ausgrid	Powershop
Australian Gas Networks (Albury)	QEnergy
Australian Gas Networks (NSW)	Real Utilities
Blue NRG	ReAmped Energy
Central Ranges Pipeline	Red Energy
CovaU	ReNu Energy
Diamond Energy	Sanctuary Energy
Discover Energy	Savant Energy
Discovery Holiday Parks	Shoalhaven Water
Dubbo North Caravan Park Pty Ltd	Simply Energy
Ecoserv Australia Pty Ltd	Solo Water
Elysian Energy	Strata Plan 19136
Endeavour Energy	Strata Plan 77096
Energy Locals	Strata Plan 78341
EnergyAustralia	Strata Plan 86870
Enova Energy	Strata Plan 90576
Enwave Mascot	Strata Plan 91533
ERM Power Retail	Strata Plan 93836
Essential Energy	Sumo Gas
Eureka Cascade Gardens (Lismore) Pty Ltd	Sumo Power
Everage	Sydney Desalination Plant
Evoenergy	Sydney Water
Flow Systems	Tango Energy
GloBird Energy	The Embedded Networks Company (trading as seen)
Goulburn South Caravan Park	The Palms Tweed Heads
Hunter Water	The Trustee for Tony & Kathy Tulich Family Trust
Jemena	TransGrid (NSW electricity transmission)
Lendlease Recycled Water (Barangaroo South)	Veolia Water Solutions & Technologies
Locality Planning Energy	Water NSW
Lumo Energy	WINconnect
M2 Energy (trading as Commander Power & Gas and Dodo Power & Gas)	YA Henry & MN Tolson
Mojo Power	Zinkohl

# Our members

NSW electricity and gas networks and retailers are required to be members of EWON. Water providers such as Sydney Water, Hunter Water and Water NSW and those licensed under the Water Industry Competition Act are also required to join EWON. Councils that provide water to their residents can join voluntarily.

We work closely and independently with our members, providing advice about their customer service and complaint-handling processes, sharing information about customer concerns and industry issues, and addressing complaints as quickly as possible. This work is aimed at raising customer service standards, promoting best practice, and reducing complaints overall.



## Member changes

### Flow Systems

EWON received advice in December 2018 that Flow Systems was under administration. The Australian Energy Regulator (AER) issued Flow Systems a Retailer of Last Resort (ROLR) notice on 15 February 2019. Flow Systems was sold to Brookfield FS Holdings Pty Ltd on 15 April 2019. The AER issued an amended ROLR Notice on 3 May 2019 advising that Flow Systems was no longer under external administration and was trading as usual. There was no impact on customers.

### Members that joined EWON in 2018/2019 include:

Sumo Power, ReAmped, Aquacell, Narara Ecovillage, Power Club, Tango Energy, Online Power & Gas (Future X Power), Zinkohl, ReNu Energy, The Embedded Networks Company (seene), Goulburn South Caravan Park, Strata Plan 86870, Strata Plan 90576, YA Henry & MN Tolson, Sumo Gas, Strata Plan 19136, Discovery Holiday Parks, The Trustee for Tony & Kathy Tulich Family Trust, Dubbo North Caravan Park Pty Ltd, Strata Plan 91533, Strata Plan 93836, GloBird Energy, Elysian Energy, Arc Energy, Strata Plan 77096, Strata Plan 78341, Eureka Cascade Gardens (Lismore) Pty Ltd, The Palms Tweed Heads and Ecoserv Australia Pty Ltd.

## Member induction training

EWON holds induction sessions for staff of our member companies. These sessions are an effective way to demonstrate efficient complaint resolution. They introduce staff of new members, and new or long-term staff of existing members, to our complaint management processes and procedures.

These sessions also include an overview of our structure, investigation processes and member reports, and provide an opportunity for us to present customer complaint case studies to members.

EWON held three member inductions in 2018/2019. The first two were open inductions in September 2018 and April 2019. For these sessions, we offered online video conferencing which proved a popular choice, particularly for our interstate members. Members that attended these sessions, either in person or via video link, were:

1st Energy, AGL, Alinta Energy, Apex Energy, Ausgrid, CovaU, Diamond Energy, Discover Energy, Endeavour Energy, Enwave Energy, Essential Energy, Evergy, Flow Systems, Jemena, Living Utilities, Locality Planning Energy, Lumo Energy, Momentum Energy, OC Energy, Power Club, ReAmped Energy, Red Energy, ReNu Energy, Sumo Power, Sydney Water and WINconnect.

Our final teleconference session in May 2019 was a tailored induction session for Origin Energy's contact centre staff based in Manila, Philippines.



## Bringing expanded jurisdiction to life - the membership drive

EWON had 86 members at 30 June 2019, 17 of which were exempt entities. At that point, we were progressing a further 81 enquiries and applications, four for authorised entities and 77 for exempt entities. The latter cover 277 individual sites in NSW with approximately 33,000 residential customers.

In preparation for the growth of EWON's membership, we rolled out a number of system changes and upgrades to streamline processing applications and managing our membership base. We developed a new Member Management System, which was finalised in September 2018, as well as a new online application form that went live in March 2019.

During 2018/2019, we worked closely with the AER to develop joint communications about the Exemption Guideline changes and the obligation to join EWON. The AER updated its website to inform exempt entities registering new exemptions of the requirement to join EWON and wrote to exemption holders, peak bodies and industry groups to advise them of the new requirements.

One of the challenges bringing exempt entities into membership is managing requests to postpone becoming a member due to business uncertainty about the future of the exemption framework, as a result of the AEMC review of the framework. A number of businesses have told us they are considering transitioning customers to an authorisation they already hold or are considering applying for an authorisation for the first time.

We have been working with other agencies and peak bodies to make exempt entities aware they need to join EWON including:

- > Caravan and Camping Industry Association NSW
- > NSW Fair Trading
- > Strata Community Association NSW.

## Member webinars

Webinars are proving to be an important new resource for members to stay connected and informed about the work we do at EWON. These interactive online sessions offer a mix of presentations by senior EWON staff and participant input. In 2018/2019, we held two member webinars, which are part of a series on 'Staying in Front of Complaints'. They were:

- > **November 2018:** 'How to get the best out of Internal Dispute Resolution and EWON's refer to higher level (RHL) process' focused on best practice internal dispute resolution and how to effectively respond to an RHL complaint.
- > **March 2019:** 'How Rapid Response expedites complaint resolution' explored the work of our Rapid Response team which aims to resolve less complex cases efficiently, fairly and effectively.

Both webinars were well attended and received positive feedback from participants. Webinar recordings are available to members through our secure member portal, EWONLink.

# Our members



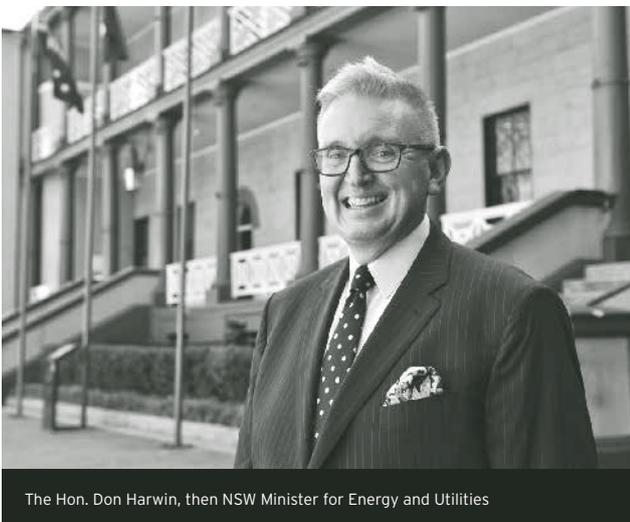
## Working with our embedded network members

We work closely with applicants during the member application process to ensure they are aware of their obligations and have a complaint-handling process in place. Many of our new members have adopted our template complaint-handling policy, telling us they found this a very useful and practical resource.

Our expanded jurisdiction means we no longer only deal with companies operating solely in the energy and water industries, with expert knowledge and resources to inform their dispute resolution and complaints management policies and procedures. The example below highlights how EWON works with our new exempt entity members to provide them with valued member services.

## Working with new members - an example

Prior to Provider A becoming a member, we received a complaint from one of its embedded network customers in relation to the refund of a security deposit. While we were processing Provider A's membership application, we discussed the customer's complaint and informed it of its obligations under the AER (Retail) Exempt Selling Guidelines and the National Energy Retail Rules. We advised that where a customer has completed one year's payments by the pay-by dates, they can request a refund of their security deposit. Provider A promptly refunded the security deposit and advised EWON that it would refund the deposits of other eligible customers.



The Hon. Don Harwin, then NSW Minister for Energy and Utilities

## Ministerial approval and re-gazettal of EWON

Amendments to EWON's Constitution were approved by members at the Extraordinary General Meeting in June 2018. As part of EWON's obligations under section 96(B) of the Electricity Supply Act 1995, the Ombudsman wrote to the Hon. Don Harwin, then NSW Minister for Energy and Utilities, about the changes required to bring exempt entities into membership, including the constitutional and funding model changes. The Minister formally responded, advising that EWON would be re-gazetted to confirm its approval as the Energy and Water Ombudsman Scheme for NSW. The notice appeared in the NSW Government Gazette on 6 July 2018, with the approval taking effect from 1 July 2018.

# EWON Consultative Council Meetings

## Bringing the community and industry together

Consultative Council Meetings are a key part of EWON's governance, providing lines of communication and facilitating collaboration between members, community workers, government representatives and small business. The Meetings offer an opportunity for our key stakeholders to speak openly, consult with each other, and build awareness about consumer issues. They also inform our investigations and policy work and provide an opportunity for our stakeholders to contribute to EWON's planning. We appreciate the contribution of everyone who participates in the Meetings. Our Constitution specifies that two Consultative Council Meetings must be held each financial year.



## 25 October 2018

EWON's first Consultative Council Meeting of 2018/2019 provided the Ombudsman, Janine Young, with the opportunity to introduce our new Chair and meeting facilitator, Mr Tony Crawford, to meeting participants. Following Tony's welcoming speech, the Ombudsman provided an overview of our work, in engaging stakeholders around affordability issues, including our contribution to the Australian Energy Regulator (AER) review of customer hardship guidelines.

Ben Davis, a Director from the Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC), spoke about the roles of the energy market bodies including the AEMC, the national objectives for electricity, gas and energy retail, as well as the AEMC's work programs and rule making process.

A panel of retailers which have participated in our Bring Your Bills Days joined Janine Young in a discussion to share their experiences at those events, the lessons they learned and their plans to better assist customers as a result of attending them.

The panel of speakers was made up of:

**Kylie Bennett**, Team Leader Collections, Hunter Water

**Allister Gammie**, Performance Manager Customer Advocacy, AGL

**Edward Redcliff**, Operations Manager Customer Advocacy, Origin Energy

**Erin Norman**, Customer Relations and Call Centre Channel Manager, Simply Energy

**Chris Mason**, Leader Customer Care Resolution, EnergyAustralia.

## 30 April 2019

Our second Consultative Council Meeting shone a spotlight on energy and water issues from the perspective of community and consumer groups. A panel of representatives from the Australian Council of Social Services, St Vincent de Paul, the Public Interest Advocacy Centre and SydWest Multicultural Services discussed the challenges the consumers they represent face with energy and water.

Panel members were:

**Kellie Caught**, Senior Advisor, Climate and Energy, Australian Council of Social Services

**Rhiannon Cook**, Manager Policy and Advocacy, St Vincent de Paul

**Clement Meru**, Community Engagement Manager, SydWest Multicultural Service

**Craig Memery**, Policy Team Leader, Energy & Water Consumers' Advocacy Program, Public Interest Advocacy Centre

The Deputy Chair of the energy sector consumer initiative, The Energy Charter, Benjy Lee, also talked about the work it is doing to embed a customer-centric culture in energy businesses to improve outcomes for consumers.

# Case study

## Billing increases following meter replacement

Mr Pilgrim noticed that his electricity bills started to increase dramatically around December 2015. He received consecutive bills for \$538, \$1,035, \$1,000, \$500 and \$1,600. He said that previously his quarterly bills did not exceed \$300, even when the size of the household increased. Also, he often worked overseas and wasn't home for more than a few weeks at a time.

Mr Pilgrim contacted his provider and was told to get an electrician to check for wiring or appliance faults. The electrician told him that everything was in order and recommended he have his meter checked. Mr Pilgrim then received a bill of \$1,035 so he arranged for his retailer to inspect the meter. When the meter inspection was due to occur, it was discovered that the distributor had already replaced the meter.

The bill following the installation of the new meter was \$28 which the customer considered to be more in line with his actual usage. The retailer said it had attempted to retrieve the old meter or meter data from the distributor so that it could review his previous bills but had not been successful.

Mr Pilgrim called EWON as he considered his retailer's response to be unreasonable. He said he thought the original meter was faulty and he shouldn't be expected to pay bills that were based on inaccurate usage.

Mr Pilgrim asked us to review the accuracy of his disputed bills, request information about the meter from the distributor, and to discuss the impact the high bills and customer service had on him.

We referred this complaint back to his retailer's specialist dispute resolution team, but Mr Pilgrim returned to EWON as he was not satisfied with the response he'd received. He said his provider offered him a \$50 credit and time to pay off the arrears, but he did not consider this to be reasonable. He said his retailer had not attempted any investigation into the matter and that their resolution was not fair.

EWON obtained actual meter reads from the distributor and our review identified increased consumption, and that meter readings were based on actual reads. We confirmed that the meter was replaced as part of the distributor's Aged Meter Replacement Program and was not tested for faults. The consumption decreased considerably following the meter replacement.

Mr Pilgrim was seeking a reduction in his bill of \$1,519. The retailer acknowledged EWON's advice and offered \$1,500 to resolve the complaint. Mr Pilgrim accepted the offer and agreed to pay the balance of around \$1,800. As Mr Pilgrim accepted the offer, EWON did not investigate the disputed increased consumption further.

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**Category:** Level 3 investigation

**Issues:** High and disputed bill, meter fault, payment difficulties

**Outcome:** Negotiated resolution

# Complaints by provider

## Top three primary issues by provider

Provider	First issue	%	Second issue	%	Third issue	%
1st Energy	Billing	28%	Credit	24%	Customer service	20%
ActewAGL	Billing	42%	Credit	26%	Customer service	21%
AGL	Billing	47%	Customer service	27%	Credit	15%
Alinta Energy	Billing	41%	Customer service	25%	Transfer	15%
amaysim Energy (includes Click Energy)	Billing	54%	Customer service	23%	Credit	9%
Ausgrid	Customer service	28%	Supply	28%	Land	22%
Australian Gas Networks (Albury)	Provision	67%	Customer service	33%	-	-
Australian Gas Networks (NSW)	Customer service	100%	-	-	-	-
Blue NRG	Billing	64%	Credit	16%	Customer service	9%
Commander Power & Gas	Billing	71%	Credit	14%	Transfer	7%
CovaU	Billing	49%	Customer service	28%	Credit	13%
Diamond Energy	Billing	62%	Customer service	18%	Digital meter exchange	11%
Dodo Power & Gas	Billing	48%	Customer service	25%	Credit	15%
Endeavour Energy	Supply	34%	Customer service	25%	Provision	22%
Energy Locals	Billing	51%	Credit	19%	Customer service	17%
EnergyAustralia	Billing	52%	Customer service	28%	Credit	10%
Enova Energy	Billing	47%	Customer service	26%	Digital meter exchange	21%
ERM Power Retail	Billing	55%	Customer service	27%	Credit	14%
Essential Energy	Supply	30%	Customer service	25%	Land	23%
Energy	Billing	86%	Customer service	10%	Credit	5%
Exempt Seller	Billing	58%	Credit	23%	Customer service	9%
Flow Systems	Billing	55%	Customer service	45%	-	-
Hunter Water	Customer service	24%	Billing	24%	Land	19%
Jemena	Customer service	47%	Provision	32%	Land	14%
Locality Planning Energy	Customer service	67%	Billing	33%	-	-
Lumo Energy	Billing	42%	Customer service	29%	Credit	26%
Mojo Power	Billing	40%	Customer service	39%	Credit	15%
Momentum Energy	Billing	52%	Customer service	24%	Credit	13%
Next Business Energy	Billing	51%	Customer service	16%	Credit	14%
OC Energy	Billing	44%	Customer service	25%	Credit	14%
Origin Energy	Billing	39%	Customer service	26%	Credit	20%
People Energy	Billing	50%	Customer service	22%	Digital meter exchange	11%
Pooled Energy	Billing	52%	Customer service	43%	Digital meter exchange	5%
Powerdirect	Billing	41%	Credit	22%	Customer service	22%
Powershop	Billing	54%	Customer service	19%	Credit	12%
QEnergy	Billing	54%	Customer service	18%	Credit	11%
Real Utilities	Billing	67%	Customer service	33%	-	-
Red Energy	Billing	40%	Customer service	25%	Credit	14%
Sanctuary Energy	Digital meter exchange	28%	Customer service	24%	Billing	24%
Savant Energy	Billing	67%	Provision	33%	-	-
Shoalhaven Water	Credit	47%	Billing	20%	Supply	13%
Simply Energy	Billing	36%	Customer service	26%	Credit	19%
Sumo Gas	Customer service	67%	Billing	33%	-	-
Sumo Power	Transfer	32%	Customer service	27%	Marketing	22%
Sydney Water	Billing	30%	Customer service	28%	Land	16%
Tango Energy	Billing	100%	-	-	-	-
TransGrid	Land	67%	Customer service	33%	-	-
Water NSW	Customer service	43%	Billing	41%	Land	8%
WINconnect	Billing	78%	Customer service	15%	Transfer, Credit	3%

# Electricity

## Customer numbers key:

- <3,000
- 3,001 - 10,000
- 10,001 - 100,000
- 100,001 - 500,000
- 500,001 - 1,000,000
- >1,000,000

## Electricity providers with no complaints

- > Apex Energy
- > Arc Energy
- > Discover Energy
- > Elysian Energy
- > Enwave Mascot
- > Future X Power
- > GloBird Energy
- > Power Club
- > ReAmped Energy
- > ReNu Energy
- > seene

## Electricity providers with fewer than 50 complaints

- > Blue NRG Energy
- > Commander Power & Gas (M2 Energy) > Lumo Energy
- > Diamond Energy > Next Business Energy
- > Energy Locals > OC Energy
- > Enova Energy > People Energy
- > ERM Power Retail > Pooled Energy
- > Everygy > Real Utilities
- > Flow Systems > Sanctuary Energy
- > Jackgreen (Former Member) > Savant Energy
- > Locality Planning > Tango Energy
- > TransGrid

Provider	Electricity customer numbers*	Cases received per 10,000 customers	Cases received 2018/2019	Cases received 2017/2018	Variance	General enquiry	Complaint enquiry	RHL	Investigation level			
									1	2	3	
<b>First tier retailer</b>												
AGL	●	49	3,936	3,959	-23	5	1,380	1,527	903	100	21	
EnergyAustralia	●	50	4,900	4,965	-65	13	1,592	2,118	856	216	105	
Origin Energy	●	48	5,437	5,277	160	22	1,665	2,280	1,171	194	105	
<b>Second tier retailer</b>												
1st Energy	●	278	304	330	-26	1	100	125	71	3	4	
ActewAGL Retail	●	65	191	204	-13	1	72	53	51	6	8	
Alinta Energy	●	101	925	649	276	2	326	372	202	13	10	
amaysim Energy	●	171	840	1,123	-283	2	317	409	99	8	5	
CovaU	●	65	76	128	-52	-	27	31	12	5	1	
Dodo Power & Gas - (M2 Energy)	●	67	218	144	74	-	74	94	41	5	4	
Mojo Power	●	234	57	106	-49	-	13	22	20	1	1	
Momentum Energy	●	97	126	86	40	-	45	58	20	3	-	
Powerdirect	●	107	222	196	26	1	100	65	50	4	2	
Powershop	●	46	140	199	-59	1	75	39	20	1	4	
QEnergy	●	138	96	64	32	-	38	41	9	5	3	
Red Energy	●	58	1,257	746	511	-	432	524	263	25	13	
Simply Energy	●	77	256	344	-88	-	84	95	69	4	4	
Sumo Power	●	602	117	-	117	-	71	32	13	1	-	
WINconnect	●	371	51	-	51	-	33	15	2	-	1	
<b>Distributor</b>												
Ausgrid	●	2	402	369	33	0	224	99	60	16	3	
Endeavour Energy	●	2	214	284	-70	0	107	66	29	10	2	
Essential Energy	●	4	320	281	39	0	141	114	49	10	6	

Only providers with over 50 complaints have been included in this table

\* Retailer customer number data reported by the AER as at 30 December 2018. Distributor customer number data provided by IPART as at 30 June 2018.

### Total electricity complaints

Level	2017/2018	2018/2019	% change
General enquiry	104	86	⬇️ 17%
Complaint enquiry	6,900	7,707	⬆️ 12%
Refer to higher level	8,557	8,274	⬇️ 3%
Level 1	4,036	4,056	⬆️ 0%
Level 2	686	640	⬇️ 7%
Level 3	336	310	⬇️ 8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>20,619</b>	<b>21,073</b>	<b>⬆️ 2%</b>

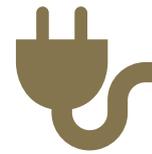
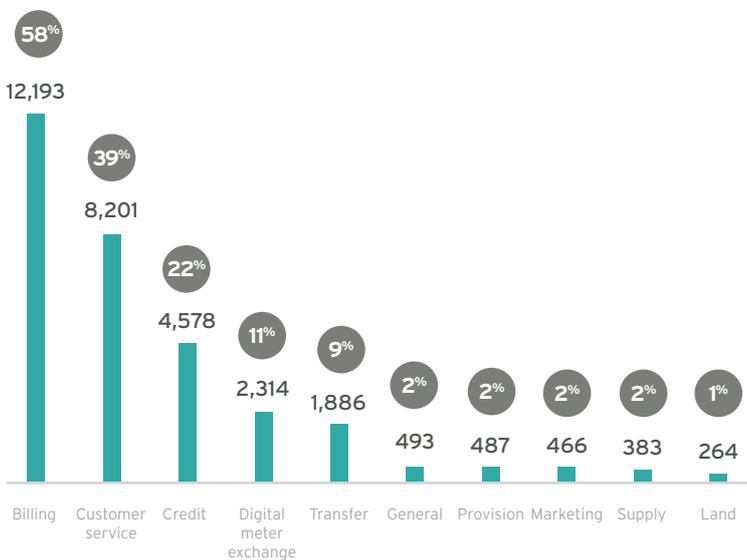
### Electricity trends

● Retailer ● Distributor ● Exempt entity



### Electricity complaints by primary issue

● % of overall complaints



# 21,073

electricity complaints received in 2018/2019



**19,365**  
residential



**1,612**  
small business



**96**  
other

(including educational, institution, government, not-for-profit, primary producer and strata schemes)



**146**  
exempt entity

(including residential parks, residential complexes and retirement villages)



**549**  
non-provider specific or out of jurisdiction cases



**2%**  
increase in complaints from 2017/2018



# 31,265

primary complaint issues

# Gas

## Customer numbers key:

- <3,000
- 3,001 - 10,000
- 10,001 - 100,000
- 100,001 - 500,000
- 500,001 - 1,000,000
- >1,000,000

## Gas providers with fewer than 50 complaints

- > Australian Gas Networks (Albury)
- > Australian Gas Networks (NSW)
- > CovaU
- > Dodo Power & Gas
- > Lumo Energy
- > Momentum Energy
- > OC Energy
- > Origin Energy exempt entity
- > Simply Energy
- > Sumo Gas
- > WINconnect

## Gas providers with no complaints

- > Allgas Energy
- > Central Ranges Pipeline
- > Evoenergy
- > GloBird Energy

Provider	Gas customer numbers*	Cases received per 10,000 customers	Cases received 2018/2019	Cases received 2017/2018	Variance	General enquiry	Complaint enquiry	RHL	Investigation level			
									1	2	3	
<b>First tier retailer</b>												
AGL	●	25	1,553	1,754	-201	5	532	637	315	48	16	
EnergyAustralia	●	30	1,111	1,474	-363	2	321	530	175	45	38	
Origin Energy	●	26	756	847	-91	2	222	364	138	23	7	
<b>Second tier retailer</b>												
ActewAGL Retail	●	31	62	83	(21)	-	28	15	17	2	-	
Alinta Energy	●	44	93	53	40	-	24	39	27	3	-	
amaysim Energy	●	57	102	62	40	-	38	49	14	-	1	
Red Energy	●	30	142	120	22	1	52	64	22	2	1	
<b>Distributor</b>												
Jemena	●	1	204	334	-130	1	94	69	40	-	-	

Only providers with over 50 complaints have been included in this table

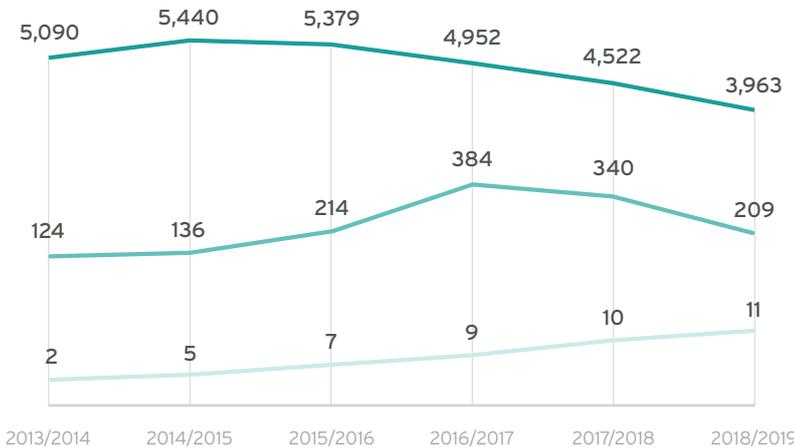
\* Retailer customer number data reported by the AER as at 30 December 2018. Distributor customer number data provided by IPART as at 30 June 2018.

### Total gas complaints

Level	2017/2018	2018/2019	% change
General enquiry	11	13	+ 18%
Complaint enquiry	1,302	1,436	+ 10%
Refer to higher level	2,320	1,811	- 22%
Level 1	1,012	764	- 25%
Level 2	178	124	- 30%
Level 3	73	64	- 12%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,896</b>	<b>4,212</b>	<b>- 14%</b>

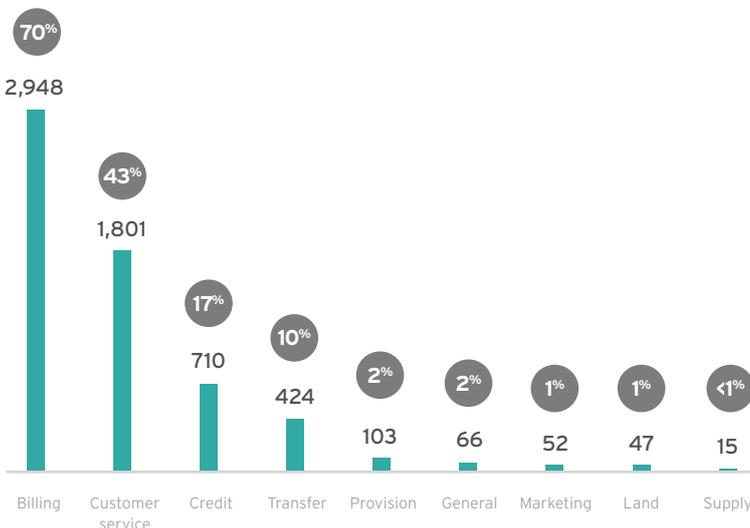
### Gas trends

● Retailer ● Distributor ● Exempt entity



### Gas complaints by primary issue

● % of overall complaints



**4,212**

gas complaints received in 2018/2019



**4,015**  
residential



**175**  
small business



**22**  
other  
(including educational, institution, not-for-profit and strata schemes)



**11**  
exempt entity  
(including residential parks, residential complexes and retirement villages)



**78**  
non-provider specific or out of jurisdiction cases



**-14%**  
decrease in complaints from 2017/2018



**6,166**

primary complaint issues

# Water

## Customer numbers key:

- <3,000
- 3,001 - 10,000
- 10,001 - 100,000
- 100,001 - 500,000
- 500,001 - 1,000,000
- >1,000,000

## Water providers with fewer than 50 complaints

- > Essential Water
- > Flow Systems
- > Shoalhaven Water
- > Water NSW

## Water providers with no complaints

- > Aquacell
- > AquaNet
- > Living Utilities
- > Narara Ecovillage
- > Solo Water
- > Sydney Desalination Plant
- > Veolia Water Solutions & Technologies

Provider	Water customer numbers*	Cases received per 10,000 customers	Cases received 2018/2019	Cases received 2017/2018	Variance	General enquiry	Complaint enquiry	RHL	Investigation level			
									1	2	3	
<b>Network/Retail</b>												
Hunter Water	●	4	92	101	-9	1	36	27	20	4	4	
Sydney Water	●	3	554	489	65	3	264	185	87	9	6	

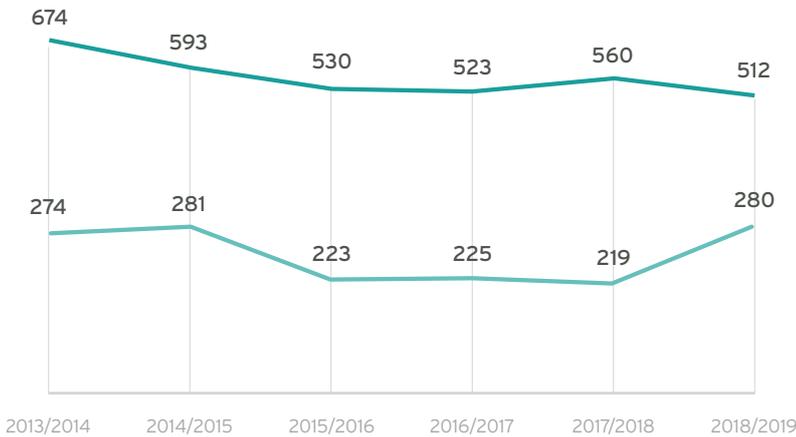
Only providers with over 50 complaints have been included in this table  
 \* Water provider customer number data provided by IPART as at 30 June 2018.

### Total water complaints

Level	2017/2018	2018/2019	% change
General enquiry	11	11	+ 0%
Complaint enquiry	438	480	+ 10%
Refer to higher level	259	225	- 13%
Level 1	78	123	+ 58%
Level 2	18	14	- 22%
Level 3	24	12	- 50%
<b>Total</b>	<b>828</b>	<b>865</b>	<b>+ 4%</b>

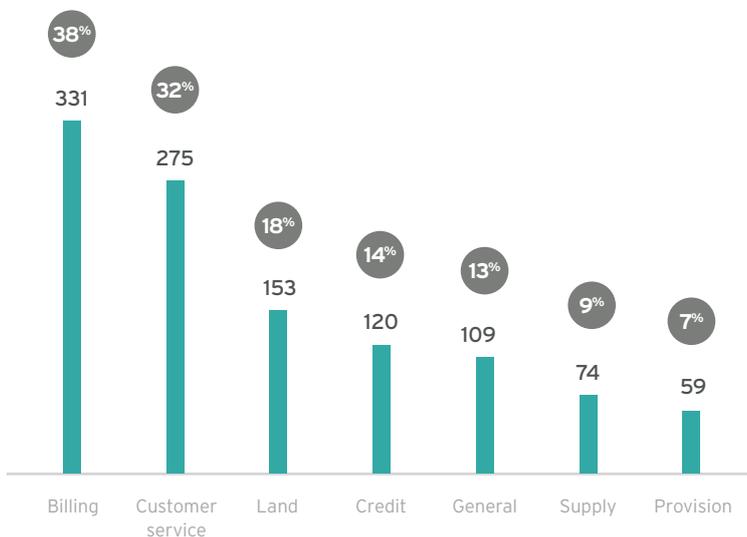
### Water trends

● Retailer ● Distributor



### Water complaints by primary issue

● % of overall complaints



**865**

water complaints received in 2018/2019



**811**  
residential



**42**  
small business



**12**  
other  
(including strata schemes and government)



**0**  
exempt entity  
(not applicable to water)



**154**  
non-provider specific or out of jurisdiction cases



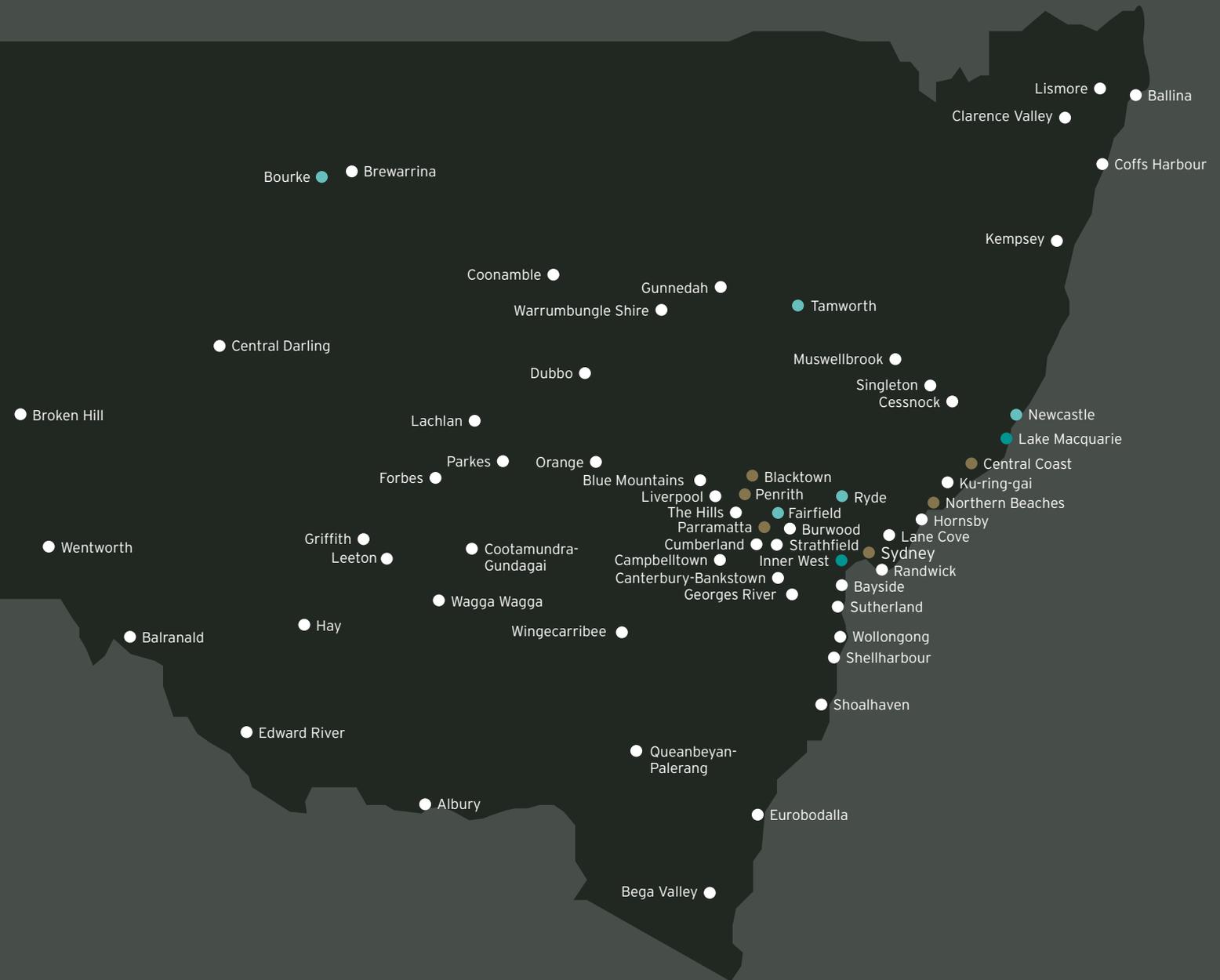
**4%**  
increase in complaints from 2017/2018



**1,121**

primary complaint issues

# Engaging across NSW



## Key

- 1 - 3
- 4 - 6
- 7 - 9
- 10+ Visits

\*map not to scale

# Community engagement

EWON's community engagement program provides a platform to promote our services and reduce complaints coming to EWON, by educating consumers, small businesses and community workers about energy and water issues. We also use it as a way of raising awareness about complaint-handling processes and financial affordability programs offered by our member energy and water providers.

Importantly, the program provides an opportunity for us to learn about issues affecting consumers first-hand. We often become aware of recurring issues in the community before they are identified through our complaint-handling work. We share this information with our Policy team and other EWON staff to ensure these concerns are raised in our submissions and stakeholder engagement.

## Our work in the community

In 2018/2019, our goal was to engage with the whole of NSW, and we aimed to hold or attend events targeting a variety of different groups including:

- > Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- > community housing tenants
- > community workers
- > people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- > people living in regional and remote areas
- > people living on low and/or fixed incomes
- > people with disabilities
- > seniors
- > small business.

## People living on low and/or fixed incomes

Energy affordability is an issue that hasn't improved since EWON's inception in 1998. Instead, due to increased energy prices, it now affects many more consumers. Working with people living on low and fixed incomes makes up a large part of the work we do. By holding and attending community events tailored to people experiencing affordability challenges, we can offer a range of assistance including setting up payment plans or negotiating to have customers put on an affordability program, ensuring they are receiving rebates, and referring them to agencies to apply for Energy Account Payment Assistance, financial counselling and broader assistance.

## Customers at risk of homelessness

In 2018/2019 we attended Homeless Connect days in Sydney city, Newcastle, Western Sydney and on the Central Coast. We met customers at risk of homelessness and who may have been facing disconnection or already been disconnected, and were able to help resolve the issues leading to disconnection.

269

**EWON outreach events held in 2018/2019**

12

**events tailored to the needs of seniors**

11

**events aimed at tenants**

## Seniors

Seniors often tell us they have difficulty understanding the complex nature of the energy and water industries. Many seniors we speak to are concerned about energy affordability, with some saying they avoid using heating, cooling and cooking appliances because they are worried about future bills. In our information sessions we ensure these customers know about the rebates they may be entitled to, how to find the best energy deal and how to access discounts. We also provide information about managing bills, saving energy and dealing with providers.

## Sydney Royal Easter Show

Each year EWON organises a marquee at Seniors Day at the Royal Easter Show and invites other services to participate. In 2018/2019 we reached over 800 seniors, many of whom said they were grateful to access so much information in one place and speak with staff from a range of organisations face-to-face. This year we were joined by Legal Aid NSW, Seniors Rights Service, NSW Ombudsman, Sydney Water, NSW Trustee & Guardian and Public Guardian and the Australian Financial Complaints Authority.

# Community engagement

## Community workers

Community workers are an important link between EWON and vulnerable consumers, and they often take on the role of advocating for consumers who are in debt or facing disconnection. In 2018/2019 we took part in a range of community events, meetings, expos and forums, and presented to the staff of many community organisations.

### Anti-Poverty Week forums

One of the key ways we engage with community workers is through our annual Anti-Poverty Week forums. In 2018/2019, EWON held Anti-Poverty Week forums for the 14th year in a row. We held a metropolitan event in Wollongong and a regional event in Bega. The forums aim to increase EWON's awareness amongst frontline staff and build the capacity of community and government workers who assist low income and vulnerable consumers.

Eighty people attended the Wollongong forum and mini expo. It was opened by Wollongong Lord Mayor, Gordon Bradbury AM. The forum featured speakers from EWON as well as Illawarra Multicultural Services, NSW Office of Environment and Heritage, NSW Planning and Environment, the Community Housing Industry Association NSW, Housing Trust and a panel of energy experts from our member providers: AGL, EnergyAustralia, Origin Energy and Sydney Water. We invited 13 other organisations who had stalls at the forum, including Law Access, Legal Aid NSW, Endeavour Energy, NSW Fair Trading and Victim Services.

The Bega forum attracted community workers from across the south eastern region of NSW. Forty people attended the event, along with 13 exhibitors. Speakers included representatives from NSW Planning and Environment, Australian Energy Market Commission, Australian Financial Complaints Authority, Australian Energy Regulator, Origin Energy, Red/Lumo Energy and the Seniors Rights Service. Exhibitors included Bega Valley Shire Council, Bega Women's Resource Centre, NSW Fair Trading, Revenue NSW, Legal Aid and the Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre.

## Housing tenants

Tenants can be particularly vulnerable as they have limited control over the energy and water efficiency of their homes, which can lead to high bills. Both public and private rental properties may have poor insulation or not be well maintained which can also lead to higher electricity costs. Tenants may have problems with common hot water systems and inefficient lighting and appliances.

In 2018/2019, we targeted tenants by continuing to work with the Community Housing Industry Association NSW to reach community housing staff and tenants. Along with the Public Interest Advocacy Centre, we took part in four training sessions, reaching over 70 workers and tenants as part of an educational initiative funded by the Office of Environment and Heritage.

## People with disabilities

We presented to two groups of community workers who work with people with a disability, including New Horizons in Kempsey and the Mental Health Interagency group in Eastwood. These presentations aimed to increase awareness of EWON's services, energy affordability initiatives and medical rebates available to consumers with disabilities.

We also presented to a group of consumers with disabilities in Blacktown. We listened to their experiences of switching energy providers and shared this information with our Policy team to look into the issues raised. The Policy team is now exploring the possibility of a rule change allowing transferable medical certificates, so customers do not need to re-register medical equipment if they switch retailers. Many customers do not know of the current requirement to register their life support equipment with their provider and are therefore at risk of not being contacted during unplanned outages or pre-warned of planned outages.

We also gave a presentation, with the aid of an interpreter, to the Chinese Diversity Disability Alliance, about how EWON can help with energy and water complaints.

## People living in regional or remote areas

In 2018/2019, an additional Community Engagement Officer role was established to support our increased focus on regional outreach. This is a combined role, as the Officer also has complaint management skills. While enabling EWON to visit more regional areas, particularly those areas affected directly or indirectly by drought, it also reduces the call on our Investigations team which provides outreach complaint staff. Another important reason we are widening our reach is the need to bring services to those communities where remoteness reduces access to services freely available to other consumers.

We also started reaching out to farmers directly to increase awareness of our services and how we can assist them through the following initiatives:

- › visiting Dubbo, Parkes and Coonamble in December 2018 with the Australian Financial Complaints Authority, the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman and a range of other services, to assist people affected directly or indirectly by the drought
- › actively engaging with the NSW Farmers Association
- › attending regional shows including the Coonamble Show in May.

## Small business

EWON assists small businesses with a range of issues including billing and contract disputes, and their retail classification as large or small energy users. Incorrect classification can result in significantly higher energy costs. Only a small number of small business customers currently access our services. To increase awareness of EWON amongst small businesses, we attend targeted events and send resources to organisations with strong links to the sector. In 2018/2019, we provided EWON resource packs to two small business events: Hornsby Council's small business workshop and the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage's small business event in Rosehill.

We engage also with small business owners through business forums and expos, as well as through trader walks, where we visit individual retail shops to offer information about energy and water issues and discuss how we can assist them.

## People from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds

23

**events for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds**

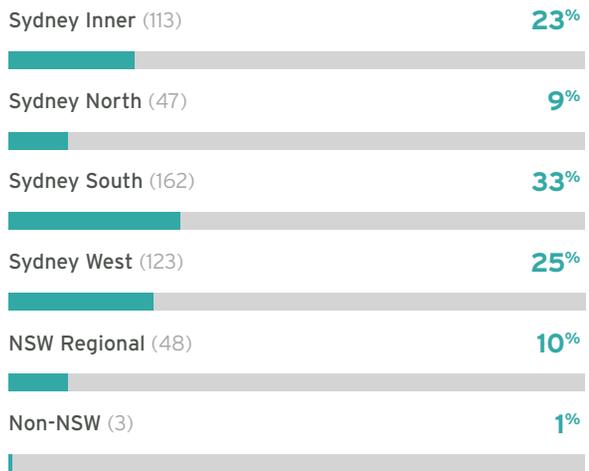
Raising awareness of our service amongst many culturally diverse communities is an important part of our community outreach program. We work with community workers, interpreters and bilingual staff, and use translated factsheets and plain/easy English presentations to break down the barriers associated with language and low literacy.

**We received complaints from customers in a variety of preferred languages including:**

- > Mandarin (109)
  - > Arabic (102)
  - > Cantonese (43)
  - > Korean (31)
  - > Vietnamese (22)
  - > Greek (20)
- > Farsi (18)
  - > Spanish (12)
  - > French (11)
  - > Thai (10)
  - > Indonesian (9)
  - > Nepalese (9)

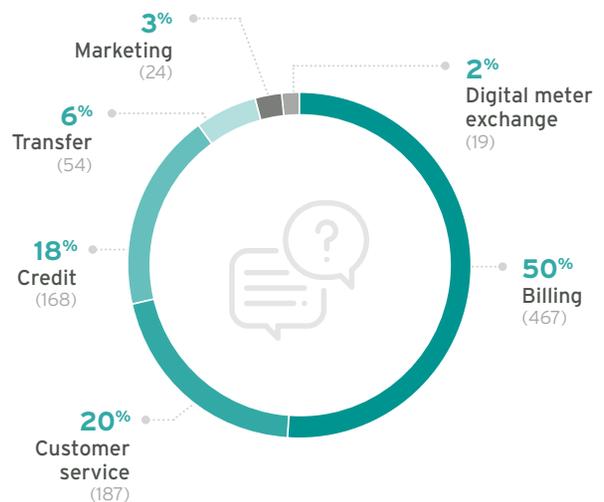
## Complaints from CALD customers

In 2018/2019, 496 customers identified as CALD when they made a complaint to us. Most of the complaints came from the area we classify as Sydney South at 33%, with 25% coming from Sydney West.



## Top issues raised by CALD customers

The top three issues raised by CALD customers were billing (50%), customer service (20%) and credit (18%).



EWON does not routinely collect information about our customers' cultural backgrounds, but we do capture this information when it is offered. For this reason, these figures may under-represent the number of CALD and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers who use our services. At the same time, we are conscious that many of these consumers may not be aware EWON can assist them and, therefore do not contact us. We continue to focus on engagement with these communities to increase awareness of our services.

# Community engagement

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

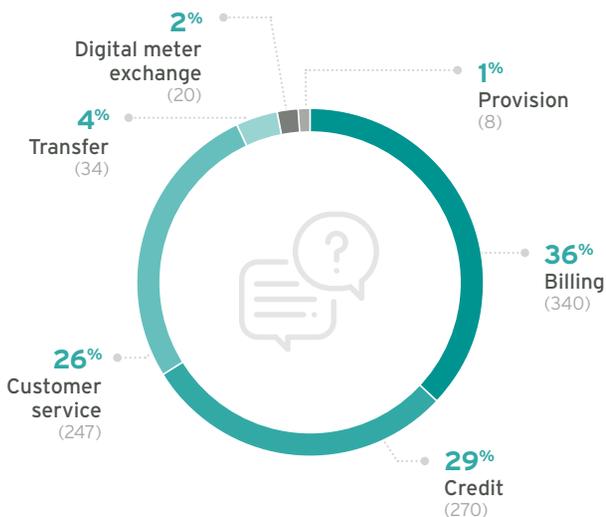
EWON's Aboriginal community engagement enables us to build and strengthen links with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, their leaders and the agencies and services that work with them. We make sure our services are accessible to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities no matter where in NSW they are.

### Top issues raised by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers

Billing and affordability issues continue to be the main reasons Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers come to EWON, with 36% of issues received in 2018/2019 relating to billing, and 29% to credit, including disconnection, debt collection and default listing. Of the 443 complainants who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander:

- > 139 reported payment difficulties
- > 120 reported high bills
- > 74 had been disconnected or were facing disconnection
- > 57 faced debt collection.

Many customers experienced a combination of these issues.



31

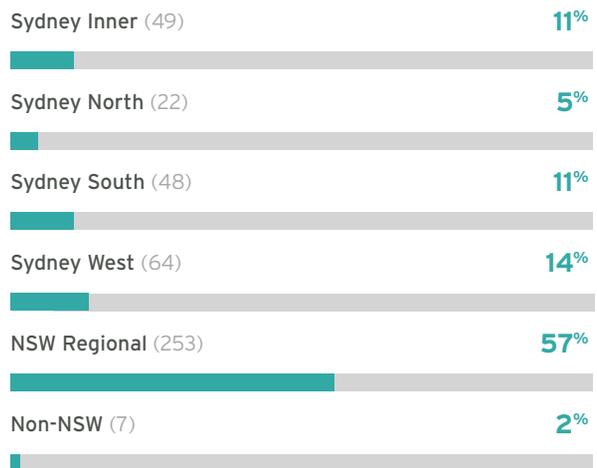
events for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community workers

56

events for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community consumers

### Complaints from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers

Around 41% of these complaints came from the Sydney region, including 14% from Sydney West, 11% from Sydney Inner and 11% from Sydney South. Around 57% of these complaints came from regional and remote areas of NSW including 11% from Far West/Orana, 7% from New England and North West, 6% from the Riverina.





EWON staff at Brewarrina Bring Your Bills Day



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Interagency meeting at EWON

## NAIDOC 2018

In July 2018, EWON attended NAIDOC week events in Campbelltown, Gosford, Nowra, Kurri Kurri and Redfern. We also invited Aunty Beryl Van-Oploo, an Indigenous Elder and educator, to EWON to speak to staff for our in-house NAIDOC celebrations. Aunty Beryl spoke about her upbringing in Walgett, her family and starting her businesses, which were set up to employ young people from her community.

## Yabun Festival

The Yabun Festival in January kickstarts EWON's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement each year. Over 30,000 people attended this year's Festival and EWON staff spoke with or provided information to over 300 customers. The day also offered a great opportunity to network with the other 150 stalls and services that attended this important cultural event.

## Good Service Mob

EWON is part of the Good Service Mob, a collaboration of Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff from complaint-handling agencies that help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers in NSW. Established in 2005, the Good Service Mob aims to ensure all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are aware of their rights as consumers, and the free services available to help them. In 2018/2019, EWON took part in the Good Service Mob community information days in Broken Hill, Menindee, Dareton, La Perouse and Katoomba.

EWON was heavily involved in rebranding and updating the Good Service Mob website, [goodservicemob.org](http://goodservicemob.org) and associated collateral to achieve a fresh and vibrant new look and help raise awareness of the group's work.

## Aboriginal Inter-agency meetings

Tracey Duncan, EWON's Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer, leads our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island engagement program and attends Aboriginal Inter-agency meetings throughout the year. The Inter-agency groups continue to play a huge role in sharing and distributing information about EWON to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in NSW. EWON also receives customer referrals from community workers attending these meetings.

## Law Week

In May 2019, EWON again took part in Legal Aid's Law Week activities in Brewarrina and Bourke. We maintain our presence in these communities to preserve our relationships with a community that now looks forward to our visits and the face-to-face support provided. Consumers speak with our staff about their concerns and lodge complaints at the events we attend. They can also access resources to help manage energy and water accounts, including information about rebates and other assistance, and tips for reducing energy and water consumption.

## Aboriginal Awareness Campaign

Well-known comedian Sean Choolburra now acts as an ambassador for our Aboriginal awareness and engagement campaigns. Sean has been a supporter of EWON's work since he became aware of our services when he took part in the NSW Aboriginal Housing Office funded Tenant Support and Education Project that EWON was involved in for over two years from 2016/2017. Sean will be the face and voice of our summer and winter energy saving campaigns.

# Community engagement

## EWON's Bring Your Bills Days go from strength to strength



EWON's Bring Your Bills Days started in 2013 and have continued to grow, with an increasing number of services and consumers attending.

These events offer face-to-face support for customers, as well as access to a range of other government and community services. They act as a 'one stop shop', targeting customers experiencing affordability issues.

At our Bring Your Bills Days, our Investigations Officers, sometimes with the help of interpreters, listen to customers' concerns, review their energy and water bills, and liaise with providers to resolve issues. Everyone benefits from the constructive engagement and the quick resolution of issues that these events offer. We also find that customers are often more willing to engage with their providers directly after EWON has brought them together for the first time at these events.

### Our largest ever Bring Your Bills Day

Over 200 residents from the Woy Woy area on the NSW Central Coast visited the Coast Community Connections centre in April 2019 to attend EWON's biggest ever Bring Your Bills Day.

Over 100 people received help with energy issues, either from EWON or from one of the four energy retailers there on the day. Many people queued to speak to their retailer about an affordable payment plan or to receive other assistance, such as having rebates applied to their account. Consumers were also assisted with Energy Account Payment Assistance, reducing the amount outstanding on their electricity and gas accounts.

We were joined by 20 other services, including Revenue NSW, the Office of Environment and Heritage, the Australian Financial Complaints Authority, Service NSW, the Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul and the Department of Human Services. Residents received help with issues ranging from tenancy, financial and legal issues to outstanding fines, cancelled licences and much more.

### Member involvement in outreach

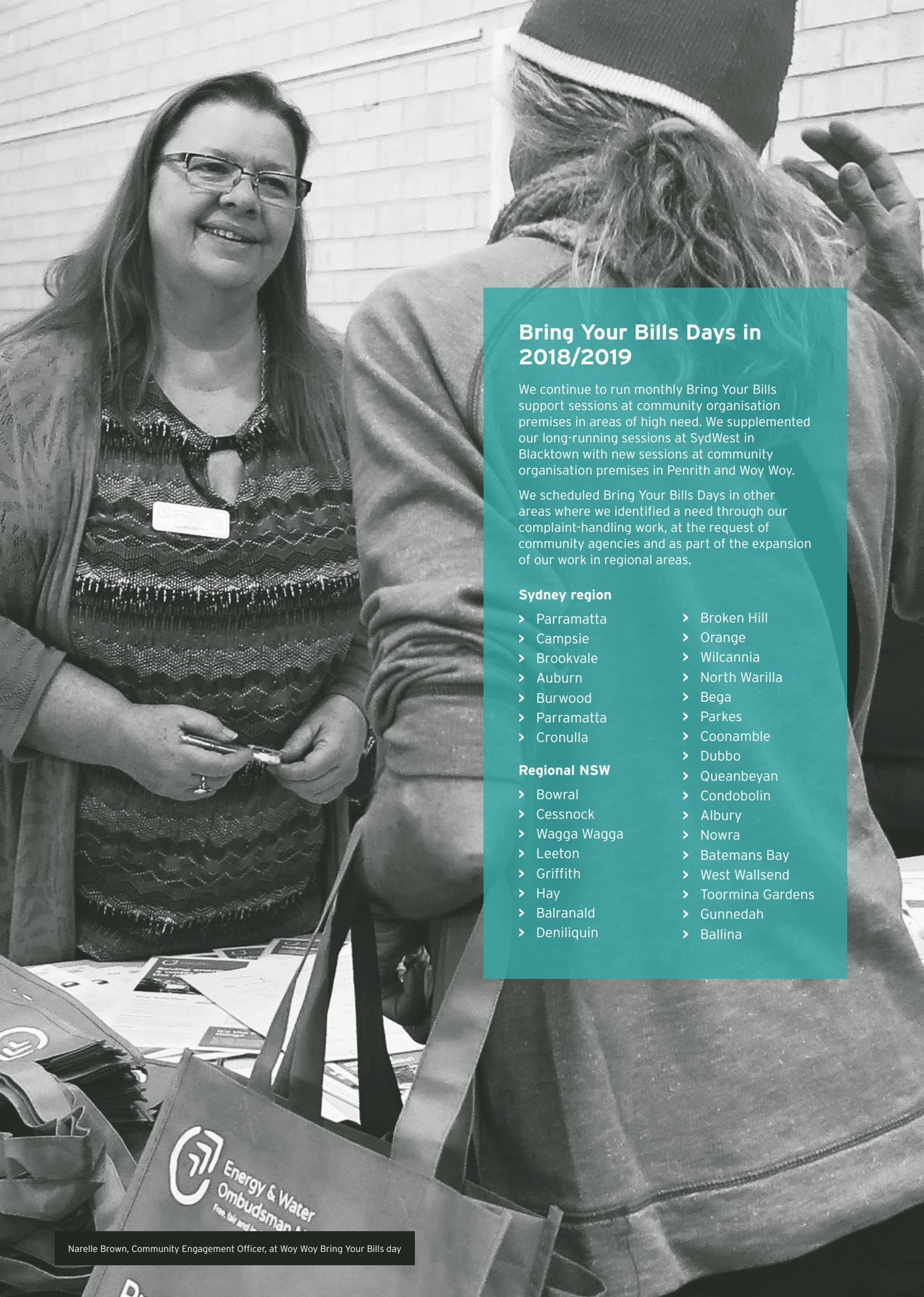
EWON started inviting members to our Bring Your Bills Days in 2016/2017. Their involvement has continued to grow since then because of the benefits it brings to them and their customers. We find the member staff who attend these events gain a deeper understanding of the challenges customers face and the impacts of some of their processes. Customers get the advantage of resolving issues on the spot with their retailers, knowing that EWON is there to assist if they are not satisfied with the service they receive or the outcome.

Retailers can also refer customers to other services at events, including Centrelink and Energy Account Payment Assistance providers, so that issues can be resolved there and then. Retailers also work together to resolve problems on the day, such as those related to customers transferring their account from one provider to another – a win-win for all!

**We had a great day and felt most customers benefited from being able to speak with us in person rather than online or over the phone. Feet on the ground and the ability to interact face-to-face was a huge plus from all customers we spoke with.**

AGL staff member,  
Campsie Bring Your Bills Day 2018





## Bring Your Bills Days in 2018/2019

We continue to run monthly Bring Your Bills support sessions at community organisation premises in areas of high need. We supplemented our long-running sessions at SydWest in Blacktown with new sessions at community organisation premises in Penrith and Woy Woy.

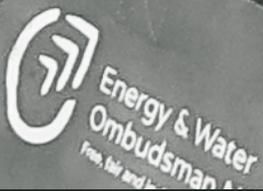
We scheduled Bring Your Bills Days in other areas where we identified a need through our complaint-handling work, at the request of community agencies and as part of the expansion of our work in regional areas.

### Sydney region

- > Parramatta
- > Campsie
- > Brookvale
- > Auburn
- > Burwood
- > Parramatta
- > Cronulla
- > Broken Hill
- > Orange
- > Wilcannia
- > North Warilla
- > Bega
- > Parkes
- > Coonamble

### Regional NSW

- > Dubbo
- > Queanbeyan
- > Condobolin
- > Albury
- > Nowra
- > Batemans Bay
- > West Wallsend
- > Toormina Gardens
- > Gunnedah
- > Ballina
- > Bowral
- > Cessnock
- > Wagga Wagga
- > Leeton
- > Griffith
- > Hay
- > Balranald
- > Deniliquin



Narelle Brown, Community Engagement Officer, at Woy Woy Bring Your Bills day

# Case study

## Customer inherits a large water bill as well as a residential property

Ms Khalif came to EWON after receiving a water bill for \$13,318 from a water provider for a property that she inherited. The bill was in the name of the previous owner, who had been aware of a water leak at the property but had not fixed the problem. Ms Khalif also had prior knowledge of the leak and billing impact.

Ms Khalif contacted the provider and asked that the debt be waived on the basis that the property was not in her name for the period of the disputed account. The provider declined to waive the debt.

Ms Khalif approached EWON and we started an investigation. Our review established that the issue related to the transfer of title and therefore aspects of the complaint were outside of EWON's jurisdiction. Under EWON's Charter, regard must be given to relevant laws, codes and good industry practice.

In this scenario, the circumstances included the transfer of a property against which a debt was secured and the transfer of ownership taking place without the water provider being given its rightful opportunity to collect outstanding water charges as part of the probate process. Finalising the investigation would have required the Ombudsman to consider laws, regulations and good practice relating to conveyancing and probate, which are not in EWON's jurisdiction.

We recommended Ms Khalif consider seeking independent legal advice. We also advised her that as the previous owner knew about the leak, and lack of corrective action led to the large debt, the provider's concealed leak policy did not apply, and she should contact it to discuss a suitable payment arrangement.

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**Category:** Level 3 investigation

**Issues:** Debt transfer, disputed high bill, billing period

**Outcome:** Out of jurisdiction – no further investigation

# Customer perspectives

I have never called an Ombudsman before and I was really daunted about the whole process. The first time I started to feel like there was some hope for me was after I had that conversation with [Investigations Officer]. I think it is wonderful that I finally got around to involving you guys because this has been going on for two years and I am really happy with you so far. I am just happy that this is in place for me and I know that something can be done about it. I know that we are on to the next step but I just wanted to let you know.

I am writing to thank you for such a speedy and successful outcome to our complaint. I particularly want to commend [Investigations Officer], who took my original phone call and [Investigations Officer] who phoned me today with the wonderful outcome. Both ladies seem to put so much into their jobs. They explained the process thoroughly and were so helpful. I have not experienced that level of help and cooperation in many years. I had thought it was non-existent these days. It really was a pleasure speaking with you both. Keep up the good work. From a very appreciative customer.

[Investigations officer] took her time to truly understand my situation asking many relevant questions; then was exceptional at answering exactly what I was asking her and provided me with a really good understanding of my rights and how to deal with it. I was extremely happy with her service so hopefully she'll be acknowledged for her great work.

The RHL has now all finally been sorted out. [My provider] is applying credit for missing Low Income Household Rebate and Medical Energy Rebate, they are sending out revised invoices to show this applied.

Thank you so much for your hard work. My problem was beautifully resolved after trying myself without any headway for six months. I am extremely grateful for your help, and also that Australia has such an essential and efficient service run by very supportive and dedicated people such as yourself.

Thank you very much for your kind support and advice to me. I followed your suggestion, I contacted [my provider]. I accepted the company's offer. The company sent me the bill of \$350.99 and I will pay this amount by due date. I was highly appreciative for you and EWON staffs' kind support and advice.

I am writing to let you know that our complaint about [provider] has finally been satisfactorily resolved. It is interesting that the meter itself is not faulty, so we were pleased not to have agreed to spend \$676 having the meter tested. Thanks, once again, for your assistance in resolving this matter.

What wonderful people you are! You have had [my provider] see the error of their ways and reduce my power bill from \$742.64 to \$55.72, a huge saving and relief to me.

I was quite cranky on my last call with [the EWON Investigations Officer] and want to apologise. I am grateful for all the help she has given me even if the outcome was not exactly what I was after; and I want to make sure that she is aware I appreciate all the work she put in to assisting me.

I had extreme difficulty dealing with [my] energy retailer, more in their actual business procedure than anything else, until I submitted the matter to you and the case went to your [Investigations Officer]. [Investigations Officer] handled the above matter with both competence and courtesy. She rapidly saw the actual centre of a long standing dispute, and eventually, came to arrange a satisfactory outcome.

# Engaging our people

EWON is committed to ensuring staff feel valued and well-supported. We ensure our values are embedded in our policies, systems and processes to support staff to effectively deliver positive outcomes in their unique roles.

As we continue to make system and process improvements, the organisational values are core to having a unified and motivated workforce. A pulse check of staff engagement showed we continue to trend upwards from 73% in 2017 to 75% in 2018.

## Our values

EWON's values express the approach we take to our work as an organisation and as individuals. The keywords for each value describe our understanding of how our actions bring these values to life every day.

### Independence

We are impartial; we approach our work transparently and openly.

### Respect

We are courteous; we build trust by listening and following through on our commitments.

### Integrity

We are open and honest; we stand by our actions.

### Service Excellence

We are proactive; we are committed to delivering high quality services to our customers and stakeholders.

### One Team

We work together; we are flexible, helpful and take personal responsibility.

### Social Justice

We are accessible and fair; we take a holistic approach to addressing customer circumstances.

## EWON Masterclass program

Our Masterclass series focuses on four streams: dispute resolution, technical knowledge, personal effectiveness and leadership.

### Dispute resolution

We engaged Donald Sword from the NSW Ombudsman to deliver a course on 'Managing Unreasonable Complainant Conduct'. This provided staff with specific strategies and skills to effectively and confidently manage difficult behaviours by customers.

Monique Richardson, a highly regarded consultant specialising in customer service, was engaged to train and coach our frontline staff on how to manage calls to enhance our service quality and efficiency.

### Technical knowledge

Steve Dooley, Customer Resolutions Manager from Jemena, shared his knowledge on gas metering, faults and connection responsibilities to build our Investigation team's understanding of gas infrastructure.



### Personal effectiveness

Through EWON's analysis of learning developments plans, we identified project management as an area of interest for staff. In February 2019, team members completed an online course and met to reinforce learnings and discuss how these key skills can be applied at EWON.

### Leadership

Our 'Stepping Up' leadership program continued for its third year. Eight participants completed the six-month program which developed their skills and knowledge as aspiring leaders.



Speaker series with Tait Jenkins



Speaker series with Aunty Beryl Van-Oploo

## EWON Speaker Series

Each year we invite people with inspiring career and personal stories to take part in our Speaker Series. In 2018/2019 we had the opportunity to hear from:

- > NAIDOC Week - Because of her, we can! - Aunty Beryl Van-Oploo, Director and Yaama Barrgay Catering Company
- > International Day of People with Disability - Tait Jenkins, Ex-Australian Athlete, Boccia
- > Getting to know EWON's new Chair - Tony Crawford, EWON Board Chair

## Be Safe and Well@EWON

### Safe and Healthy Workspace

In 2018/2019, we continued offering initiatives driven by the staff Health and Safety Committee and senior leaders. One of the initiatives rolled out as part of EWON's Safe and Healthy Workplace Framework was use of standing workstations to encourage staff to 'sit a little less'.

### Be you... be well!

A range of wellbeing activities were offered to staff in a diverse quarterly program developed by the Health and Safety Committee. Staff had the opportunity to opt into activities including:

- > Healthy breakfast@work
- > Massage@work
- > Yoga@lunch
- > Mindfulness@lunch
- > Walking@lunch

## Australasian reporting awards

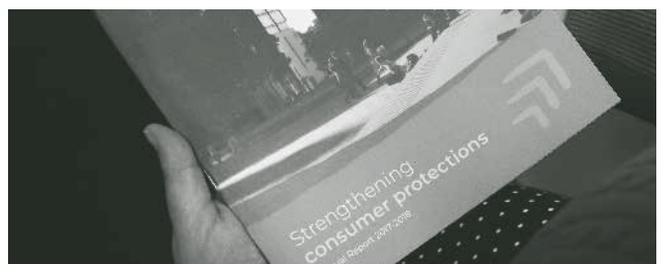
EWON's 2017/2018 Annual Report received a Silver Award in the general category of the 2019 Australasian Reporting Award. These awards recognise excellence in reporting, benchmarking our Annual Report against set criteria. Well done to all staff involved in the production of the Annual Report!

## Complaints Management System upgrade

In November 2018 our upgraded Complaints Management System went live. To ensure the system rollout was effective, we took staff on a journey focusing on why the change was necessary and what benefits the System would bring to their roles. As part of the process we ran a 'Train the Trainer' program internally and engaged a professional training company to deliver a one day workshop on 'delivering effective system training'. We established a group of champions who became our change agents supporting our commitment to ensure staff felt heard and the system supports their needs.



Healthy breakfast@work



Our award winning 2017/2018 Annual Report

# Financials

Balance Sheet	2019 \$	2018 \$
<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>		
Cash and cash equivalent	1,940,984	1,671,657
Trade and other receivables	4,776,160	5,838,802
Other Deposits	3,171,010	3,006,121
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	<b>9,888,154</b>	<b>10,516,580</b>
<b>NON-CURRENT ASSETS</b>		
Property, plant and equipment	1,416,043	634,930
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>11,304,197</b>	<b>11,151,510</b>
<b>CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>		
Trade and other payables	7,431,600	7,328,299
Provision - annual leave and long service leave	776,989	805,489
<b>Total Current Liabilities</b>	<b>8,208,589</b>	<b>8,133,788</b>
<b>NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>		
Provisions	362,455	369,673
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>8,571,044</b>	<b>8,503,461</b>
<b>Net Assets</b>	<b>2,733,153</b>	<b>2,648,049</b>
<b>FUNDS</b>		
Unrestricted funds	2,733,153	2,648,049
<b>Total Funds</b>	<b>2,733,153</b>	<b>2,648,049</b>
<b>Cash Flow Statement</b>		
<b>CASH FLOWS FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES</b>		
Funding received (Members)	14,727,493	11,840,553
Payment to suppliers, employees and other	-13,185,821	-11,351,051
<b>Net cash inflow from Operating Activities</b>	<b>1,541,672</b>	<b>489,502</b>
<b>CASH (OUTFLOW) FROM INVESTMENT ACTIVITIES</b>		
Interest Received	114,994	110,493
Payment for plant, equipment and intangibles	-1,222,450	-151,447
Interests paid	-	-
Net cash flow from investment activities	-1,107,456	-40,954
Net increase in cash held	434,216	448,548
Cash at the beginning of year	4,677,778	4,229,230
<b>Cash at the end of the year</b>	<b>5,111,994</b>	<b>4,677,778</b>
<b>Statement of income and operating expenditure</b>		
<b>FUNDING RECEIVED</b>		
Annual case fees	10,360,875	9,592,895
Annual fixed fees	1,973,619	1,688,027
Joining fees	79,775	21,800
Interest received and sundry income	123,318	122,748
<b>Gross Income</b>	<b>12,537,587</b>	<b>11,425,470</b>
<b>LESS EXPENDITURE</b>		
Communications	143,244	139,553
Depreciation & Amortisation	408,595	362,675
Employee-related expenses	281,862	242,825
Occupancy costs	972,530	925,707
Operating expenditure	1,925,510	1,377,222
Salaries and on-costs	8,720,742	8,585,945
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>12,452,483</b>	<b>11,633,927</b>
<b>Net Surplus</b>	<b>85,104</b>	<b>-208,457</b>



Tony Crawford, EWON Board Chair



Liz Develin and Katharine Hole, Department of Planning and Environment, with Janine Young, Ombudsman



EWON staff at the 21st Anniversary celebrations



Richard Gross, Ausgrid; The Hon. Matt Kean, NSW Minister for Energy and Environment; Janine Young, Ombudsman; and Craig Memery, PIAC



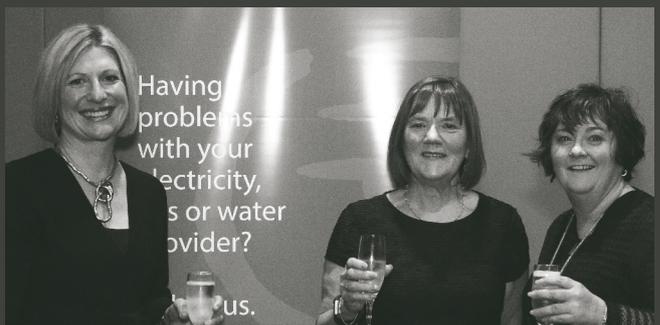
Tony Crawford, EWON Board Chair with Janine Young, Ombudsman and Board Directors



Clare Petre, former Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW speaking to Rod Stowe, former NSW Fair Trading Commissioner



EWON staff at the 21st Anniversary celebrations



Cynthia Gebert, Energy and Water Ombudsman VIC; Jane Pires, Energy and Water Ombudsman QLD with Janine Young, Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW

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## Keep in touch

